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Low-Level Waas Makes EMS Flying Safer

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by **ROBERT P. MARK**

July 29, 2013, 2:10 PM

Mercy One helicopter emergency medical services at Mercy Medical Center in Des Moines, Iowa, one of the first HEMS operators certified to fly Waas low-level IFR routes, including approaches to local hospitals, recently added a second Waas-capable Bell 429 to its fleet. These IFR routes keep helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft from mixing in IFR airspace. Three of the hospital helipad approaches are Waas-based while another is an approach to a helipad in Stuart, Iowa, that is used as a rendezvous for helicopters and ground ambulances from surrounding counties.

Before they got Waas capabilities, Mercy One helicopters operating on IFR flight plans landed at Des Moines International Airport (KDSM) approximately seven miles from the hospital to transfer patients via ground ambulance, adding half an hour to the time-critical total transport process.

Last year the FAA approved a Waas-enabled low-level helicopter route infrastructure—including five Waas approaches—for the greater Des Moines area that expedites the Mercy One operation. A helicopter point-in-space Rnav approach procedure and an obstacle departure procedure were also designed for each of the five landing sites, along with the new low-altitude IFR en route structure to connect them.

Mercy One helicopters can now reach any destination in Iowa within an hour even in weather conditions as poor as 300-foot ceilings and three-quarters-of-a-mile visibility.

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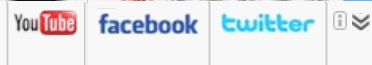
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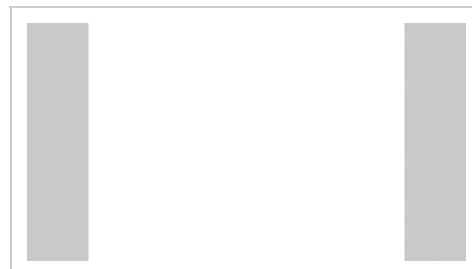
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