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FROM THE NATIONAL ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION

FAA Issues Policy on Harnesses for Human External Cargo (HEC) Operations

On September 25, 2025, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) issued Policy Statement PS-AIR-27/29.865 clarifying that ANSI/ASSP Z359.11-compliant full body harnesses may be used as the body harness portion of Personnel Carrying Device Systems in Class B Human External Cargo (HEC) operations. This represents a significant shift, aligning FAA policy with OSHA standards and providing operators with more flexibility.

Background

Historically, HEC operations required specialized harnesses as part of FAA-approved equipment. However, these harnesses are not always aligned with OSHA fall-protection requirements. The new FAA policy recognizes ANSI/ASSP Z359.11 harness, including those commonly used in construction and utility clearance, as acceptable alternatives for HEC, provided operators meet certain conditions and update their Rotorcraft-Load Combination Flight Manual (RLCFM).

Key Policy Points

To adopt these harnesses in HEC operations, operators must:

- Ensure the external-load attaching means is FAA-approved.
- Use harnesses designed for their intended function, including a frontal D-ring for suspension work.
- Identify in the RLCFM the party responsible for static-strength and fatigue inspections, which ANSI testing satisfies.
- Follow manufacturer maintenance guidelines, with mandatory retirement at five years from the date of manufacture unless the manufacturer specifies a shorter period.
- Include annual inspections by a qualified person, in addition to pre- and post-flight checks.
- Document all instructions and limitations in the RLCFM per §133.47(c)(3).

Conclusion

The FAA's policy creates consistency between OSHA fall-protection requirements and FAA HEC regulations, reducing equipment conflicts and expanding operator options. Employers should look to update RLCFM and revise training programs to ensure safe, compliant adoption.

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