

Night flying: we need your help

Could you help us find night-landing sites for the air ambulance?

With our new AW169 helicopter comes the capability to operate in the hours of darkness and so we will be increasing our operating hours to 19, from the current 12, to cover the period from 07.00am through to 02.00am. Although the crew will be using the latest night-vision technology to assist them, flying at night does increase the overall risk levels that they face. The crew will always try to get the helicopter as close to the incident as possible so that the medical team can get to the scene quickly and to then facilitate movement of the patient into the helicopter for transfer to hospital. Therefore, the crew will generally be taking the helicopter into a location they haven't been to before and so there may be hazards present, such as power lines or masts, which are difficult to see at night.

Why the best site
To reduce the risk when flying into such locations at night, the crew will spend some time, after being notified of an incident, looking at computer images of possible landing sites nearby.

Because images can be out of date, or livestock may be present when the helicopter arrives on scene, two possible locations, a primary and a secondary, are chosen and then closely examined for possible hazards. Only when the crew are happy and have planned their approach into the selected sites do they launch the helicopter.

Precious minutes are lost carrying out these vital surveys of possible night landing sites, but there is another option. If we had a grid of pre-surveyed landing sites across the two counties, then we could launch to one of those sites with the minimum of planning and so bring our life-saving service to where it's needed with minimum delay.

Therefore, we are looking for communities, or individuals, to offer us the use of their field, sports pitch or playing field as potential night landing sites for the air ambulance.

What we need

What we require is a level area of grass, tarmac or concrete that measures a minimum of 30 metres by 60 metres (a football pitch measures 45 metres by 90 metres), has pedestrian access to the site and vehicle access close by.

Do not worry if there are tall trees surrounding the site, or there are power lines present as we will survey all potential sites before adding them to our network. There will be no need to install lights, or make any changes to the location.

If you think that you have suitable land or an area to support our night flying operations, we would be delighted to hear from you.

Please email: info@dsairambulance.org.uk or call: 01823 669604.