



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
September 25, 2024  
Contact: Bailey Wood  
Email: [baileyw@verticalavi.org](mailto:baileyw@verticalavi.org)

## VAI Conference Elevates Industry Air Tour Safety Standards

*Industry leaders collaborate on best practices, innovations, and strategies.*

Honolulu, Hawaii (Sep. 24, 2024) – Over 100 air tour operators, safety experts, and pilots from across the United States convened for the inaugural Air Tour Safety Conference, hosted by Vertical Aviation International (VAI), formerly Helicopter Association International (HAI). The two-day event, which took place Sep. 23–24 in Honolulu, Hawaii, focused on elevating safety standards within the vertical aviation industry’s air tour sector.

The conference featured an array of sessions tailored to enhance participants’ knowledge of and practical skills in vertical aviation safety. Topics ranged from risk management and safety management system (SMS) implementation to leveraging emerging technologies and promoting a proactive safety culture.

“Safety isn’t just about compliance; it’s about fostering a culture that prioritizes the well-being of every passenger and crew member,” said Chris Hill, VAI’s senior director of safety. “This event has empowered operators with the tools and knowledge needed to make feasible changes in their organizations.”

Key highlights from the conference include:

- **Raquel Girvin, FAA regional administrator for the Western-Pacific region:** In her remarks, Girvin updated attendees on policy changes affecting operators and general aviation. She reminded the audience of the new FAA requirement for companies conducting air tours, air ambulance operations, charters, and commuter flights to [implement an SMS by May 2027](#).
- **SMS Implementation:** Featuring top experts from the FAA and industry, the panel discussed best practices and strategies for meeting the latest safety protocols, providing participants with actionable steps for achieving SMS compliance.
- **Technology and Data Integration:** Sessions explored the integration of advanced weather data, health and usage monitoring systems (HUMS), and flight-data monitoring (FDM) to enhance operational safety and decision-making.
- **Proven Passenger Safety Techniques:** FAA Senior Accident Investigator Matt Rigsby shared critical insights on ensuring passenger safety, from preflight briefings to in-flight procedures and post-flight evaluations.



## PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 25, 2024

Contact: Bailey Wood

Email: [baileyw@verticalavi.org](mailto:baileyw@verticalavi.org)

The conference also provided ample opportunities for networking, with participants engaging in frank discussions and forming valuable connections with industry peers and safety experts.

“We’re thrilled to have brought together such a diverse group of operators to focus on one common goal: enhancing the safety and success of air tour operations,” said Mark Schlaefli, VAI Board chair and owner of Dakota Rotors. “This conference set a new standard for collaboration and knowledge-sharing in our industry, and we are excited to build on the momentum of this event.”

Feedback from attendees affirms the need for continued dialogue and education on air tour safety. VAI is committed to making the Air Tour Safety Conference an annual event, providing a crucial platform for operators, regulators, and safety professionals to come together and strengthen the industry’s safety record.

For more information on VAI and the association’s upcoming events, visit [www.verticalavi.org](http://www.verticalavi.org).

**Vertical Aviation International**

1920 Ballenger Ave., 4th Flr. Alexandria, VA 22314 / 703-683-4646 / [info@verticalavi.org](mailto:info@verticalavi.org) / [verticalavi.org](http://verticalavi.org)