May 4, 2026

The Honorable Bryan Bedford
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Re: Aviation Coalition Letter on Preventing Future Slackline Accidents

Dear Administrator Bedford:

On behalf of the **37** undersigned aviation organizations, we write to highlight several safety issues raised by the recent helicopter slackline accident near Superior, Arizona and to respectfully ask the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to review those issues in consultation with industry and other relevant stakeholders. Although this accident involved a helicopter, the safety issues it raises extend more broadly to other vertical aircraft operating in low-altitude airspace, including powered-lift aircraft and unmanned aircraft systems.

According to the National Transportation Safety Board's preliminary report, on January 2, 2026, an MD Helicopters MD369FF, operating as a Part 91 personal flight, struck a highline/slackline near Superior, Arizona, resulting in the deaths of the pilot and three passengers. The report states that the slackline was suspended between canyon anchors approximately 0.74 miles apart and reached an estimated height of about 600 feet above ground at its highest point. The report further states that a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) describing a "tight rope" about 3 nautical miles south of Superior Municipal Airport had been filed and was active at the time of the accident.

FAA data identifies accidents described with the phrase "struck object during low altitude ops" as among the deadliest recurring types of accidents threatening helicopter operations.[1]

[1] Federal Aviation Administration, *FAA Safety Briefing*, Mar./Apr. 2026, at 14–15, https://www.faa.gov/sites/faa.gov/files/MarApr2026.pdf

Specifically, low-altitude object strikes accounted for 15 percent of Part 91 helicopter fatal accidents and were the highest occurrence category for Part 133 and Part 137 helicopter fatal accidents, at 40 percent and 73 percent, respectively.[2]

In light of that continuing risk, we believe this accident highlights several safety issues that merit further FAA attention.

Temporary obstruction visibility and marking

First, this accident raises questions about the visibility and marking of temporary obstructions that may penetrate navigable airspace. In this case, the slackline extended to approximately 600 feet above ground, placing it in airspace accessible by low-altitude aircraft. Existing FAA rules already require notice for the proposed construction or alteration of certain obstructions, including temporary ones, particularly those exceeding 200 feet above ground level and certain objects located near airports and heliports.[3] FAA guidance further states that any temporary or permanent structure that exceeds a Part 77 obstruction standard or an overall height of 200 feet above ground level should be marked and/or lighted.[4]

This accident underscores the importance of examining whether slacklines and similar temporary obstructions are being addressed with sufficient clarity under existing notice and marking frameworks and whether those frameworks are effective in reducing the risk of low-altitude aircraft striking obstructions.

NOTAMs and obstruction depictions

Second, the accident raises questions about the adequacy of current notification practices for temporary obstructions, including whether FAA requirements and guidance should more clearly address when slacklines and similar temporary obstructions penetrating navigable airspace are subject to pilot notification requirements (i.e., obstruction NOTAMs) and how those NOTAMs should be issued.

This issue is especially important as the FAA continues modernizing the National Airspace System and works to ensure that critical safety information is communicated in digital formats that can be used consistently across platforms.

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[2] *Id*.

[3] 14 C.F.R. § 77.9; Federal Aviation Administration, "Notification of Proposed Construction or Alteration on Airport Part 77," stating that notice is required for any construction or alteration exceeding 200 feet above ground level, certain objects near airports and heliports, and that "[a]ll obstructions, whether permanent or temporary, are subject to the notice requirement outlined in 14 CFR Part 77," available at https://www.faa.gov/airports/central/engineering/part77

[4] Federal Aviation Administration, Advisory Circular 70/7460-1M, *Obstruction Marking and Lighting* § 2.1 (Nov. 16, 2020), stating that "[a]ny temporary or permanent structure, including all appurtenances, that exceeds any obstruction standard contained in 14 CFR Part 77 or an overall height of 200 feet … above ground level (AGL) should be marked and/or lighted".

The existence of a NOTAM in this case demonstrates that, even when a NOTAM is present, it may not be readily seen or understood by a pilot. This underscores the need to examine how these NOTAMs are disseminated and whether they can be issued in a way that supports consistent graphical depiction across systems and improves pilot safety.

Some electronic flight bag (EFB) products, avionics systems, unmanned aircraft planning tools, and apps, including resources such as the U.S. Helicopter Safety Team's VFR Prediction Tool and its slackline planning tool, already support graphical or map-based presentations of NOTAM information, but that capability remains inconsistent and depends on the availability of structured geospatial data that can support reliable graphical depiction, including precise coordinates, altitude, effective time, and other information necessary to support reliable graphical depiction across platforms. The objective should be to ensure that, both during preflight and while inflight, pilots have access to a graphical presentation of obstruction NOTAMs overlaid on aeronautical charts in preflight planning products, EFBs, installed avionics, and other relevant digital aviation tools.

Outreach to ensure compliance by non-aviation communities

Finally, the accident also highlights the importance of outreach, awareness, and compliance among non-aviation communities whose activities may create hazards in navigable airspace.

In the case of slacklines and similar temporary obstructions, safety depends not only on pilot awareness, but also on broad understanding of applicable requirements, clear expectations regarding markings and notification, and meaningful compliance with those expectations by all involved parties. This is especially important as low-altitude airspace becomes more complex due to the continued growth of helicopter operations and the emergence of new entrants, including powered-lift aircraft and unmanned aircraft systems.

We respectfully ask the FAA to review these issues expeditiously and, in consultation with stakeholders, consider appropriate policy, operational, or technical changes to improve temporary obstruction notice and marking, improved dissemination of obstruction information, and more consistent graphical depiction across digital aviation tools to avoid another fatal accident like the one in Superior, Arizona that occurred earlier this year.

We also note that the concerns raised in this letter are supported by the McCarty-Heideman family, who lost loved ones in the Superior, Arizona accident.

We appreciate the FAA's continued engagement on low altitude aviation safety and welcome the opportunity to engage further as the agency evaluates these issues.

Sincerely,

National Aviation Organizations

Airborne Public Safety Association
Air Medical Operators Association
Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association

Alaska Airmen's Association
American Spray Drone Coalition
Association of Air Medical Services
Association for Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International
BackcountryPilot.org
Balloon Federation of America
Commercial Drone Alliance
Experimental Aircraft Association
General Aviation Manufacturers Association
National Agricultural Aviation Association
National Air Transportation Association
National Association of State Aviation Officials
National Business Aviation Association
United Aerial Firefighters Association
U.S. Helicopter Safety Team
Vertical Aviation International

State and Regional Agricultural Aviation Associations

Arizona Agricultural Aviation Association
Arkansas Agricultural Aviation Association
Association of Montana Aerial Applicators
California Agricultural Aircraft Association
Georgia Agricultural Aviation Association
Indiana Agricultural Aviation Association
Iowa Agricultural Aviation Association
Louisiana Agricultural Aviation Association
Minnesota Agricultural Aircraft Association
Mississippi Agricultural Aviation Association
Nebraska Aviation Trades Association
New Mexico Agricultural Aviation Association
North Carolina Agricultural Aviation Association
North Dakota Agricultural Aviation Association
Ohio Agricultural Aviation Association
Oklahoma Agricultural Aviation Association
Pacific Northwest Aerial Applicators Alliance
Texas Agricultural Aviation Association