

Landing Your Helico

Just because your helicopter is able to pretty much land anywhere doesn't mean it should. There are rules about where you can land, and sometimes it just comes down to flying neighbourly.

"It all comes down to rule 91.127 *Use of Aerodromes*," says Roger Shepherd, CAA's Investigating Officer ARCs. "Put simply, the place you're going to operate your aircraft to or from needs to be suitable for taking off and landing."

That means it has to be fit-for-purpose. Is the space big enough for a helicopter to land? Are there any obstacles or hazards to a helicopter operation like telephone poles, buildings, or trees?

Then there's ownership of the land. While the Civil Aviation Rules don't require express permission from the land owner, Roger says it's a very good idea to have this. "Not only because it's the courteous and 'flying neighbourly' thing to do, but you'll learn much more about any hazards in the area you're landing in, including wires."

Some aerodromes may require permission before landing, so check *AIP New Zealand, Vol 4*.

There may be other restrictions covering where you're planning to land, for example conservation rules. Different councils may have restrictions where you can land your helicopter. You should contact the relevant council or landowners for further information.

Approach and Departure Paths

If your helicopter doesn't have Class 1 performance (and most operating in New Zealand don't) then you have to ensure that all approach and departure paths have space to perform an autorotative landing in an emergency. This has to be possible without causing

damage to people or property.

For example, if you're planning on landing in a reserve adjacent to a beach in a single engine helicopter, then your approach path can't fly over people picnicking in the reserve or on the beach. This of course can change from day to day.

One day you fly into a reserve by the beach; it's deserted and so you can come and go freely. The next time you go there, however, there could be a surf lifesaving competition, or a scout jamboree, or a family picnicking with their kids. In those situations you can't land there, so then what?

Plan B

There's a good reason that 'always have a Plan B' is so often stated in aviation.

Helicopter in a Public Place

"If you're planning on landing somewhere, a beach for example, what will you do if there are people where you want to approach and land?" asks Roger.

"You can't expect to just hover in your helicopter and wave your hands telling people to move."

You should know where your plan B landing spot is going to be. It may not be in the most convenient location, but it must be clear and safe to land.

My Neighbour Doesn't Want My Helicopter Landing Here

"This is a common complaint," says Roger. "Recently, someone was building a new home in Northland and decided to visit the site by helicopter to check on progress. He planned on landing on a public reserve between his and another property. He doesn't need to ask adjacent property owners for this, but he did ask the closest property owner.

"However, another got upset about it

and lodged an Aviation Related Concern which I followed up, explaining that the helicopter is allowed to take off and land there."

"Later, I contacted the guy doing the building, and explained that there had been a complaint.

"I asked how he would know the landing spot was safe, if he had been flying north for 30 minutes?

"Fortunately, he understood the importance of having another landing site – his plan B. He knew that if he couldn't land at his planned site, he had other options," says Roger.

Closed Airfields

Sometimes, helicopters have landed at closed aerodromes. "This is definitely not OK," says Roger. "There are several reasons why an airfield can be closed. Most often it's a safety concern."

Some aerodromes have other activities taking place, such as drag racing, model jet races, or driver training, which make

landing an aircraft hazardous, both for the aircraft and the people on the ground.

Remember, the white crosses are there for a reason and they apply to all aircraft – fixed wing or helicopters.

"Basically, if there are X marks on the runway, no aircraft can land there," says Roger.

Summary

Where you plan to land must be safe. If you get there and find it's not, use your plan B.

If you're in a helicopter without Class 1 performance, you must have clear approach and departure points allowing you to perform an autorotative landing in an emergency without causing third-party endangerment.

The best advice the CAA can offer after following the rules is to fly neighbourly. Talk to other property owners that will be affected by your helicopter landing there. Keep the skies friendly and everyone will be happy. ■

A Good Approach

A property owner up near Leigh, north of Auckland, had engaged a helicopter company to fly them in and out regularly for a few weeks. The property owner got permission from all his immediate neighbours, something he didn't actually need, but which makes things a lot easier for everyone involved.

The operator figured out an approach and departure path that would comply with the rules ensuring there was space for an autorotative landing if needed. They also

wanted to ensure extra performance capability of the helicopter, so they limited it to two people on board and to operate in winds of 15 knots or less. This was important, as there was only one safe way in and out, and a strong easterly wind would make manoeuvring the helicopter a safe distance from the house difficult.

"They looked at all the possibilities to work out their plan, and that's what we would expect of every operator," says Roger.