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SUBJECT: MUTUAL SUPPORT DURING EMERGENCIES & THE EJECTION DECISION

1. RECENT MISHAPS HAVE IDENTIFIED THREE CRITICAL SAFETY CONCERNS THAT NEED TO BE BROUGHT TO THE ATTENTION OF CREWMEMBERS IMMEDIATELY.

2. FIRST, THERE IS AN ALARMING INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF CREWMEMBERS EJECTING BELOW PUBLISHED MINIMUM EJECTION ALTITUDES. IN THE LAST

12 MONTHS, THERE WERE 27 SUCCESSFUL EJECTIONS FROM 24 AIRCRAFT.

OVERALL, THIRTY SEVEN PERCENT (10 EJECTIONS) OCCURRED BELOW

PUBLISHED MINIMUMS AND 3 OCCURRED AT THE 2000 FOOT AGL CONTROLLED

EJECTION ALTITUDE. SEVENTY THREE PERCENT (8 OF THE 11 EJECTIONS)

IN THE PAST SIX MONTHS WERE BELOW MINIMUMS. THE MAJORITY OF THE

ABOVE EJECTIONS OCCURRED IN AIRSPACE FOR WHICH THE CREW HAD MISSION

PLANNED AND BRIEFED MINIMUM EJECTION ALTITUDES.

3. A CREWMEMBER THAT EJECTS AT THE 2000 FOOT AGL CONTROLLED

EJECTION ALTITUDE HAS APPROXIMATELY ONE MINUTE AND FORTY

SECONDS IN THE PARACHUTE. A WELL TRAINED AND DISCIPLINED

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CREWMEMBER, WITH NO COMPLICATIONS, CAN COMPLETE THE REQUIRED POST EJECTION STEPS AND PERFORM A SAFE PARACHUTE LANDING FALL IN THE AVAILABLE TIME. UNFORTUNATELY, THAT SELDOM HAPPENS. CREWMEMBERS FREQUENTLY BEGIN THEIR PROCEDURES AND CAN BECOME DISTRACTED UNTIL THEY REALIZE GROUND IMPACT IS IMMINENT. THEY SELDOM MANEUVER THEIR PARACHUTE TO THE BEST LANDING SITE OR ORIENT THEMSELVES INTO THE WIND. WHEN THE CREWMEMBER IS NOT IN CONTROL OF HIS OR HER PARACHUTE LANDING, THE PROBABILITY OF INJURIES INCREASES. ANY INJURY CAN LEAD TO DELAYED RESCUE, INCREASED INJURY, CAPTURE, OR DEATH. PRESSING BELOW MINIMUM EJECTION ALTITUDES AND NOT COMPLETING VITALLY IMPORTANT POST EJECTION PROCEDURES BEFORE LANDING ARE UNSAFE PRACTICES THAT MUST BE CORRECTED.

4. ANOTHER SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM HAS BEEN INADEQUATE COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN LEAD, WINGMEN, AND/OR OTHER CREWMEMBERS THAT PREVENTED CORRECT ASSESSMENT OF VARIOUS AIRBORNE SITUATIONS AND TIMELY EJECTION DECISIONS. RECENT FLIGHT MISHAP REPORTS REVEALED A DOWNWARD TREND IN THE QUALITY OF MUTUAL SUPPORT DURING NORMAL OPS OR WHEN FACED WITH AN AIRCRAFT MALFUNCTION OR IN-FLIGHT EMERGENCY (IFE). THE WELL-PROVEN CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE METHOD APPEARS TO HAVE BROKEN DOWN. CRITICAL CHECKLIST ACTIONS HAVE BEEN MISSED BY FORMATION

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NO

MEMBERS AND UNCHALLENGED BY OTHER PARTICIPANTS. ERRONEOUS ASSUMPTIONS AND POOR AIRMANSHIP HAVE FLOURISHED WITHOUT CHALLENGE. EVEN MORE DISTURBING IS THE FACT THAT IN ALMOST ALL POORLY HANDLED IFE(S), AT LEAST ONE FORMATION MEMBER NOTED THE DISCREPANCIES AND HAD THE SMARTS, THE SOLUTION(S), OR THE TIME TO GET MORE INFORMATION, BUT DID NOT SPEAK UP. THE EXCUSES FOR FAILING TO SUPPORT THE IFE FLIGHT MEMBER INCLUDED: "IT WAS NOT MY AIRCRAFT" OR "I WAS JUST A STUDENT, A WINGEE, OR A BACKSEATER." ALSO, INAPPROPRIATE CHASE FORMATION POSITIONING DURING AN IFE SIGNIFICANTLY DEGRADED THE ABILITY TO SUPPORT THE IFE PILOT AS NOTED ABOVE. FUTILE REPEATED ATTEMPTS TO RECOVER FAILED ENGINES ARE DRIVING CREWS TO CONTROLLED EJECTIONS WELL BELOW THE RECOMMENDED 2000 FEET AGL MINIMUM. IN RECENT MISHAPS, THESE DELAYS WERE NOT CHALLENGED BY CHASE PILOTS OR BACKSEATERS. BECAUSE OF A RECENT CONTROLLED EJECTION AT LESS THAN 400 FEET AGL, A PILOT SUFFERED SEVERE INJURIES. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT ALL FORMATION MEMBERS PROVIDE ACTIVE AND FULL FLEDGED SUPPORT DURING IFE(S). HUMAN FACTORS SPECIALISTS INDICATE THAT CREWMEMBERS, WHEN CONFRONTED WITH IFE INDUCED STRESS, MAY NEED EXTERNAL OR INTERPERSONAL INTERVENTION TO ALTER THEIR INAPPROPRIATE PERFORMANCE/ACTIONS.

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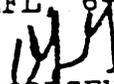
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5. FINALLY, RECENT SEARCH AND RESCUE COMBAT AIR PATROL (SARCAP) PERFORMANCE FOLLOWING AN EJECTION HAS BEEN POOR. IN SOME INSTANCES, THE SARCAP AIRCRAFT CAME VERY CLOSE TO CRASHING. FAILURE TO MONITOR ALTITUDE AND AIRSPEED HAS CAUSED LOW ALTITUDE WARNINGS IN THE HUD AND VOICE INDICATORS. ANOTHER PROBLEM HAS BEEN CAPPING TOO HIGH, WHICH LIMITS ASSISTANCE TO THE DOWNED CREWMEMBER. ADDITIONALLY, ONE AIRCRAFT PREMATURELY DEPARTED THE SARCAP WITHOUT INSURING THAT THE DOWNED CREWMEMBER WAS VISUALLY ACQUIRED BY RESCUE FORCES. THE PROCEDURES ARE IN PLACE. STRICT ADHERENCE WILL MAXIMIZE AIRCREW SAFETY IN FUTURE MISHAPS/INCIDENTS.

6. REQUEST YOU BRING THESE ISSUES TO THE ATTENTION OF ALL CREWMEMBERS IMMEDIATELY.

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