

Los Angeles Area Helicopter Noise Coalition

Citizens seeking relief from helicopter noise – A problem for more than 40 years

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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LA RESIDENTS DISAGREE WITH FAA ON HELICOPTER NOISE PROGRESS

Los Angeles, CA – The Los Angeles Area Helicopter Noise Coalition (LAAHNC), who represented LA area residents in recent talks, strongly disagrees with the FAA's Significant Progress Report on the Los Angeles Helicopter Noise Initiative and releases the following statements.

On April 21, the Secretary of Transportation, based on a report from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), found that "significant progress" has been made in addressing helicopter noise in Los Angeles County. LAAHNC board members participated in what the FAA calls a "collaborative engagement" with stakeholders (helicopter industry and residents) in an attempt to reach agreements on voluntary flight practices to reduce noise.

"LAAHNC participated in 55 stakeholder meetings in the last two years," said LAAHNC President Bob Anderson, who also is a board member of the Sherman Oaks Homeowners Association. "We are discouraged. We made numerous proposals, such as adjusting existing voluntary helicopter routes and altitudes, but we could not come close to reaching agreement with helicopter operators on any significant solutions. We explored every possibility thoroughly and came up empty handed. That is not significant progress."

Under the Consolidated Appropriations Act, passed in January 2014, Congress directed the FAA, through the Secretary of Transportation, to take steps to reduce noise impacts on residents of Los Angeles County; otherwise, at the end of one year, unless the Secretary could demonstrate significant progress, the FAA would have to begin the regulatory process to address the problem. According to Anderson, "The FAA attempted to broker negotiations between residents and pilots regarding new voluntary operational practices. We were optimistic that with intensive discussions under the Congressional mandate, we would be able to make some progress. But, in general, the pilots were only willing to agree to existing practices with minimal changes, or long standing, industry-developed, voluntary noise abatement policies which have proven to be ineffective."

Working groups, led by LAAHNC board members, were formed for stakeholders to study and discuss specific problems and potential improvements. Problems were thoroughly discussed, but there were virtually no agreements on solutions.

Dave Garfinkle, President of the Tarzana Property Owners Association, led a working group on best practices. According to Garfinkle, "We tried to get the news media and law enforcement to agree to a set of best practices, such as limiting non-emergency helicopter hovering time, establishing higher flight altitudes, pooling helicopter coverage of news events, and asking law enforcement to fly higher when not engaged in active emergency operations. The best we could get was general promises to do better, but no agreements on specific practices, such as flying at least 2,000 feet above ground level, whenever possible, which is already an existing FAA Advisory Circular. The helicopter industry claimed to have adopted best practices on hovering and pooling of resources, but pilots routinely ignore those so-called agreements."

Stakeholders agreed there is a high concentration of helicopter flights on the shoreline, but could not reach agreement to recommend that pilots fly farther offshore. Richard Root, LAAHNC board member who led the working group to consider offshore routes stated, "Despite resolutions citing the need for helicopter noise relief from the County of Los Angeles, State of California, and fifteen cities, nine of them on the coastline from Malibu to Long Beach, we could not get pilots to agree to voluntary offshore routes any farther than 300 feet from the shoreline. That's not far enough offshore to make much of a difference."

Another LAAHNC board member, Gerry Hans, also Friends of Griffith Park President, led a working group that considered the area centered around the Cahuenga Pass and Griffith Park. He said, "Helicopter pilots

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routinely vary from the current voluntary route over the Hollywood Freeway and fly low over hillside residences and natural areas to get a closer look at the Hollywood Sign and the Observatory. In the process, they impact residents of Hollywood Hills where the noise bounces back and forth in the canyons. Even if we could get agreement on new voluntary measures, compliance would still be an issue.”

Donna Sievers, Long Beach resident and Bluff Heights Neighborhood Association Vice President, led two stakeholder working groups. One group considered the major helicopter route from the Long Beach Airport to the coast and another considered countywide outreach to pilots to inform them of voluntary practices. She said, “While there was agreement that Long Beach residents are significantly impacted by all helicopter operations including flight schools and tourist flights, no significant progress has been made to reduce helicopter noise over neighborhoods and schools. With respect to pilot outreach, without agreements on new voluntary operational practices, there is nothing new to communicate to bring about substantial noise reduction.”

The FAA recommends that stakeholders continue the collaborative engagement. However, Anderson said, “Despite a lot of time and hard work, our members don’t see any hope of getting helicopter operators to agree to voluntary flight practices to reduce noise in the foreseeable future. Unless helicopter pilots are willing to significantly modify their positions and agree to voluntary measures that would truly reduce noise, there is no point in prolonging the talks. We need to consider any and all other approaches.”

LAHNC board members believe that since no significant progress has been made, the Secretary should begin the regulatory process as called for in the Act passed in January 2014. The FAA could consider adopting regulations governing helicopter operations, making them mandatory for pilots. In the past the FAA has been reluctant to do so. But, in 2012, in response to helicopter noise impacts on residents of Long Island, New York, the FAA did issue regulations and established the nation’s first mandatory helicopter route, and it seems to be working. The helicopter industry opposed those regulations and petitioned the court to overturn them. But, in a precedent-setting decision in 2013, the District of Columbia Appeals Court upheld the FAA’s action.

GO TO OUR WEBSITE AT <http://www.LAHelicopterNoise.org> TO VIEW THESE IMPORTANT SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

- FAA Significant Progress Report
- LAAHNC Letter to Congress on FAA Progress Determination
- LAAHNC Comments on FAA Progress Report
- Section 119D of the Act of Congress
- Local Government Supporters of Helicopter Noise Relief
- Appeals Court decision – HAI v. FAA
- FAA Advisory on Altitude for Noise Abatement

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