Acadian Ambulance Service

Looking to Oil Companies to Back Program

Acadian Ambulance, PHI Study Increased Offshore Service

Charles Lenox

It appears that it's just a matter of time until Acadian Ambulance Service and Petroleum Helicopters combine their resources and talents to offer a complete offshore service to the Gulf of Mexico.

Acadian put Air Med One into service last year and in just the first four months of operation, the helicopter has been sent out on more than 300 calls. The calls are for traffic accidents, hospital-to-hospital, onshore industrial and offshore industrial.

Acadian has two paramedics or one paramedic and one nurse on board. PHI has delegated two pilots to alternate on seven-day shifts.

Larger Helicopter Available

Air Med One can only fly during daylight hours, but PHI makes a larger helicopter available for nighttime emergencies. Acadian personnel say that about two or three night calls a week are made offshore.

In addition to Air Med One and two pilots, PHI has agreed to provide Acadian with maintenance and backup aircraft. This, in the occasional use of the larger helicopter and medical personnel and Acadian officials calculate that the cost of their helicopter service is about $50,000 a month. The charge for a helicopter ambulance call is $200 a liftoff and $2 a mile with a minimum charge of $400.

But the complaint from oil companies is that Air Med One is a single engine helicopter. So Acadian officials are looking at a dual engine aircraft for the future. Winning such a ship with eight pilots and eight paramedics for a 24-hour service, Acadian and PHI estimate operating costs reaching $130,000 a month.

Look to Oil Companies

Acadian has been looking to oil companies to underwrite some of the expense. Acadian has been talking to some of the major oil companies in the hopes that 16 of them can be convinced to underwrite some of the expense.

It is possible that within a year Acadian will buy a Bell IFR 232. Bell tells Acadian officials that there are no ambulance-configured 232's in the U.S. only one in Europe.

Acadian would like to take delivery of the new aircraft in the spring, but it depends on the response of the oil companies to underwrite the expense.

Hospitals Are Responding

The hospitals in southern Louisiana are scrambling to keep pace with Acadian's expanding service by developing convenient landing facilities. The biggest problem is heliports. Eighteen of the 80 hospitals in southern Louisiana have heliports and the rest are looking into building them.

The three major hospitals in Lafayette are hurriedly making heliports, but right now Air Med One is landing on the football field at UL.

So it appears that big things are in the works and with approximately 70,000 workers currently employed on offshore rigs in the Gulf, we are sure that many in the oil patch are hoping that Acadian and PHI can put it all together.