

Bell Helicopter Flight Training Operations | Frequently Asked Questions

Why is Bell Helicopter flying over north Tarrant County?

The Bell Helicopter Training Academy trains experienced pilots who need additional type certifications, many of whom use Bell aircraft for life-saving air medical, firefighting, and police missions to serve their local communities all over the world.

Our main facility is located at Bell's Global Headquarters in Fort Worth on Highway 10. Our practice area, where we train critical landing maneuvers, is located just north of Texas Motor Speedway, requiring our aircraft to transit to the training fields.

Flight path options are limited by several factors, including airspace for DFW International Airport, Alliance Airport, and Meacham International Airport, which is governed by the FAA. In order to maintain the safest level of operations, flight routes and procedures utilized must be repeatable, predictable, and consistent. Following major roadways is a best practice in the rotorcraft industry.

We are sensitive to the noise impact of these operations and have tried to balance this concern while maintaining safe operations to and from our training field.

Bell Helicopter is working towards a solution to reduce or completely eliminate traffic along Highway 377 and Rufe Snow flight paths. Our Executive Leadership Team is committed to and actively involved in evaluating several options.

Why did Bell Helicopter move its northbound flight path to Rufe Snow from Highway 377?

When we first began transiting to our north training field from our Fort Worth campus, the Hwy. 377 corridor was used. To maintain a safe distance from our north- and southbound traffic, our pilots flew about 1/4-mile from each side of the highway each other and at a staggered altitude. In response to complaints from residents along the Hwy. 377 route, we chose to split the route, moving northbound flights to Rufe Snow in March 2016.

Splitting the route allows our pilots to fly centerline over the road, where available, and at the max allowable altitude in both directions. Residents along Hwy. 377 have voiced appreciation for this change as it dropped the volume of flights near their homes by half.

Can we consider rerouting over I-35, west of I-35, or east of Precinct Line, FM 1938/Davis?

I-35 intersects with the landing approach into Alliance airport. The volume of traffic coming in and out of Alliance airport during daylight hours prevents us from using this path on a regular basis. Our flight operations into Alliance airspace are outlined in a Letter of Agreement.

We follow I-35 in the evening when Alliance traffic volume is lower, and therefore safer to accommodate our aircraft. Due to this, our late-evening, night vision goggle trainings are now mostly conducted along I-35.

We have considered a route west of I-35, however there is a lack of large roads to fly over to mitigate the noise impact of our operations to the west. A flight path over Precinct Line or FM 1938/Davis would only extend the noise impact of our operations to another community. Our ultimate goal is to implement a solution to further reduce or completely eliminate traffic along the Highway 377/ Rufe Snow flight path.

Bell Helicopter strives to fly in a manner that lessens the noise impact and is making every effort to "fly neighborly" over roadways when available.

What does it mean to “fly neighborly”?

Fly Neighborly is a set of guidelines provided by Helicopter Association International (HAI). Bell Helicopter follows all of the Fly Neighborly recommendations when possible. Our pilots fly more than 1,000 ft. above the ground, or higher when possible.

As recommended, we conduct altitude climbs at a slower airspeed and descents at cruise airspeeds. We avoid turns when changing altitudes, and the only time we turn is to stay over the roadways or divert to a preferred route (ie. I-35 when available).

HAI’s Fly Neighborly recommendations for reducing the noise impact of helicopter operations do not supersede safety or certain critical missions. For example, helicopter air ambulance providers fly low and fast from point to point to save lives.

All Bell Helicopter training aircraft are equipped with GPS devices to monitor Bell Helicopter’s traffic along the flight path. This data is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure adherence to “fly neighborly” standards.

Per flight tracking applications, like Flight Radar 24, it appears that Bell is not flying neighborly and at low altitudes. I have sent these screen shots for review, what do you have to say?

Flight Radar 24 flight tracks are reasonably close but not necessarily exact. Some of the tracks provided include flight details that show a “calibrated altitude,” which is an approximation. We have seen ground speeds posted as low as 3 knots, which is highly unlikely and also points to the overall inaccuracy of the application.

I am concerned about the safety of the operations flying over or near my neighborhood. What about Bell Helicopter’s recent crash?

The Bell Helicopter accidents reported in North Texas were during experimental operations out of our Flight Research Center. It is important to understand the difference between training and experimental operations. The training flights conducted out of Bell Helicopter’s Fort Worth campus to our north training fields near Alliance Airport are in FAA-certified aircraft – not developmental aircraft.

Our experimental and developmental flight operations are based out of our Flight Research Center in Arlington. Experimental flight paths are over rural and unpopulated areas south of the DFW metroplex.

The safety of our operations is our top priority. Over the past ten years, Bell Helicopter has had zero safety incidents while in transit to our training grounds. *(No records were kept beyond ten years.)*

Bell Helicopter Training Academy instructors are highly-credentialed professionals training experienced helicopter pilots. Many of our customers are training to use Bell aircraft for life-saving air medical, firefighting, and police missions to serve their local communities all over the world.

Bell Helicopter claims they have reduced volume of air traffic along the flight path. How so?

When possible, louder twin-engine training helicopter (Bell 412 and 429) operations are being rerouted to Arlington and Fort Worth/Meacham airports for training, reducing both the volume and noise of our operations along the current flight path.

On days with low cloud cover, which forces our flight operations to lower altitudes, we have reached an agreement to divert up to 50 percent of all training operations to Fort Worth/Meacham and Arlington airports, when the airports are experiencing lower airplane traffic.

We have diverted the majority of our late-evening, night vision goggle training flights to Alliance Airport, following an Interstate 820 and I-35 flight path. Each operation will require a case-by-case approval from Alliance tower. Based on our discussions with Alliance, circumstances that would cause the tower to reject our evening flights would be rare.

These efforts to divert louder, low-altitude and late-evening flights from the main flight path became effective in August 2016. We continue to look into options to make incremental improvements to reduce the volume of traffic similar to these improvements, until a long-term solution is in place.

What are the results of the noise studies Bell Helicopter has conducted?

Ongoing noise studies have revealed the noise exposure level created by our operations along the current flight path to be in the range of 70 decibels (equivalent to a vacuum cleaner at 10 feet) to 89 decibels (equivalent to a propeller plane flyover at 1,000 ft) depending on the type of aircraft and less than one minute in duration on average, ie. roughly 20 total minutes of noise on any given day of typical operations.

Why can't our pilots fly higher into Class B airspace?

Class B airspace exists to protect commercial aircraft traffic. As a safety precaution and to ensure our operations do not tax DFW air traffic control, Bell Helicopter will not repeatedly enter Class B airspace.

What happened to the effort to obtain a carve out of Class B airspace and fly higher into controlled airspace Bell Helicopter previously mentioned?

Bell Helicopter discussed this option with the FAA which revealed a long and complex process.

We have chosen to focus our efforts on reducing or eliminating traffic along the Highway 377/ Rufe Snow flight path. In the meantime, we continue to look into options to make incremental improvements to reduce the volume of traffic, until a long-term solution is in place.

What is the minimum altitude for helicopter operations?

Per the Code of Federal Regulations 91.119 (d)(1), a helicopter may be operated at less than the minimums prescribed in paragraph (b) or (c) of this section, provided each person operating the helicopter complies with any routes or altitudes specifically prescribed for helicopters by the FAA.

Per FAA Part 135.615 (b) While conducting Visual Flight Rules (VFR) operations, the pilot in command must ensure that all terrain and obstacles along the route of flight are cleared vertically by no less than 300 feet day and 500 feet night.

Bell Helicopter operates well above these minimums at 1,800 ft. MSL when available, and we do not fly when conditions would force us lower than an 800 ft. ceiling. There may be times when weather moves in or changes along the route of flight. These occurrences would require us to fly a lower altitude to avoid instrument meteorological conditions (IMC).

Is Bell aware the Rufe Snow routing takes them through the traffic pattern at Stage Coach Hills airport (4TX2)? FAR 91.126 requires helicopters to avoid fixed wing traffic.

To ensure the highest level of operational safety, we are aware of all hazards along our flight path. Our northbound (Rufe Snow) and southbound (HWY 377) routes keep us on the east and west sides of Stage Coach Hills airport and away from Stage Coach Hills traffic pattern. Our pilots stay in radio contact with Alliance tower along the route. Alliance tower provides traffic alerts to airplanes transiting in and out of Stage Coach who are in contact with traffic control.

I have heard rumors that the noise would be increasing? Is that true? And, if so, when?

Bell Helicopter customer training is based on demand. At this time, there are no significant changes planned that would increase the volume of our Fort Worth flight training operations.

Why can't Bell Helicopter bus their student pilots to Alliance/Justin Field? It seems it would reduce helicopter wear and tear and save fuel?

Bell Helicopter's leased training field north of Alliance is designed for touch and go operations and does not house maintenance, storage, fuel, or indoor facilities to accommodate our operations and students.

If Bell Helicopter has GPS trackers, why are residents being asked to call and log complaints?

Due to Bell Helicopter's volume of flight operations to Justin Field, most of the complaints received from residents along the Rufe Snow and 377 corridors during standard hours of operations have matched up to our training aircraft. However, there are many that have not, and hence are operated by other users.

Participation in the complaint tracking system ensures your concerns are recorded and taken into consideration as we approach short-term and long-term alternatives to further reduce the noise of our operations on the surrounding community. Area residents who have filed a complaint and provided their email address via our [Noise Mitigation System](#) will receive periodic updates via email.

What does Bell Helicopter do with the GPS tracking data?

This data is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure adherence to "fly neighborly" standards and to rule out complaints that do not correlate to a Bell helicopter.

I sent videos showing you that your pilots are not flying the routes. Do you look at them?

We review videos and photos sent to us and match them with our flight tracking data when possible, to ensure adherence to "fly neighborly" standards and to rule out complaints that do not correlate to a Bell helicopter.

Can Bell Helicopter put markings on bottom of our aircraft to help them identify them as Bell?

We have taken this recommendation into consideration, but will not be pursuing this suggestion.

Can you provide two-week snapshot of Bell Helicopter's training operations?

Based on demand, typical hours of operations run from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Late evening flights may be scheduled Monday through Thursday during which pilots are instructed in the use of night vision goggles for law enforcement, medical and energy applications. The following shows the two-week period as a representative example of our training schedule:

	Prior to 8:00 am	Standard Operating Hours (8:00 am to 5:00 pm)	Night Vision Goggle Training*	
Week 1	3 (7:30 am)	60	4 (9:00 pm)	5 (11:00 pm)
Week 2	0	99	0	

**Please note night vision goggle training flights have now been rerouted to I-35 per an agreement with FAA and Alliance Airport. Each operation will require a case-by-case approval from Alliance tower. Based on our discussions with Alliance, circumstances that would cause the tower to reject our evening flights would be rare.*

Can Bell Helicopter hold another Town Hall update?

We have promised to hold another Town Hall by June 30, 2017. We expect to hold this at Keller Town Hall or a similarly convenient location. In the meantime, area residents who have filed a complaint and provided their email address via our [Noise Mitigation System](#) will receive periodic updates via email.