

Association for Critical Care Transport
Position Paper on Crash-Resistant Fuel Cells for Helicopter Air Ambulances
November 2015

The Association for Critical Care Transport (ACCT) is a patient advocacy association organized for the purpose of assuring access to and supporting the provision of high-level, high-quality critical care and transport, by air and by ground, for critically ill and injured patients. A common obligation of providers and regulators of Helicopter Air Ambulance (HAA) services is to assure the highest reasonable levels of safety for the crews providing the care and the patients transported, many of whom have no choice of provider and no knowledge of the safety records or safety commitments those providers have made or that regulators require.

The members of ACCT have observed, with concern, the instances of otherwise survivable HAA crashes that have resulted in serious injury or death because of a post-crash fire. Between 1994 and 2013 there were 221 deaths and 37 serious injuries from post-crash fires in HAA accidents at a cost of tens of millions of dollars and immeasurable pain and suffering on behalf of the survivors and family members of the victims.

ACCT believes this is a time-critical and vital issue for patient and crew safety, the significant costs of which will be more than offset by the losses of people, property, and equipment in post-crash fires, not to mention the real and emotional costs of treating the survivors for their post-crash burn injuries.

ACCT supports and encourages the development of crash-resistant fuel cells by aircraft manufacturers and the requirement of such by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for all HAA aircraft. A requirement for this type of cell should allow providers a reasonable period of time for compliance, but there should be no opportunity for “grandfathering” older aircraft, excluding them from compliance. ACCT supports the establishment of a near-future date by which all HAA vehicles will be required to be outfitted with crash-resistant fuel cells.