

Traffic Helicopters

Many listen to the radio station's traffic helicopters on a regular basis, especially the interstate commuters or "beltway bandits." Why not get your boating safety message "up in the sky" during prime time? Some television stations also employ traffic pilots. Here are a couple of ideas for you.

Listen to the radio stations with traffic 'copters and start you a small research data bank. Learn who the person is and when they report on traffic for each station. Have a good idea what you want from the pilot, before calling. Years ago government officials rode in these helicopters, but that was back then. The rules have changed. So, since you cannot fly with the pilot and get your water safety message to the public, how can you get the word out with the help of the voice in the sky?

It will take a creative plan or two, but it can be done. After collecting the data, give the radio station a call and ask for the traffic pilot's telephone number at the hangar. You might get lucky and get it the first try, but not likely. Next, ask to have the pilot give you a buzz after the radio program. You might luck out and make contact that way. Another is to telephone a contact at the radio station and get the pilot's number or how he can be reached. This is a toughie. Keep trying. You'll get it.

Plan one. Make an appointment with the pilot and discuss the water safety campaign. Ask him or her how it can be done. Here's one idea. You or a Corps representative might have a three-way radio hookup, e.g., the radio studio (D.J.), plane (pilot) and hangar (you) on mobile phone. The traffic pilots use the mobile radios/phones during inclement flying weather.

Plan two. Sit in the plane and chat with the pilot before taking off. Give the skyway voice some facts about drowning and what your campaign is doing to reduce the rate. In other words, the pilot does the talking for you.

Plan three. Give the pilot and the radio D.J./personality some water safety background at a meeting with the three of you. If possible, bring in the sports/wildlife announcer and the news director. There is a possibility of having a three-way conversation going with you in the studio.

Plan four. Provide a water safety PSA to the radio host, with some background to both the host and the pilot. This way they might chat about the boating accidents and what the Corps' plan is to reduce the fatalities and drownings, then add the PSA, without you being there.

Plan five. Meet with the pilot and discuss the water safety campaign. Ask to ride in the car during inclement weather so you can chat about water safety during "drive time" reports.

Plan six. Many times the traffic pilot reports during morning and afternoon rush hours. So, if the morning D.J. says "no," try to work with the afternoon "jock" and the pilot. Use any combination.

Plan seven. Have the Corps challenge the radio station to a charity ball game. This way you will get to chat about the ball game, maybe with the traffic reporter. Make a point before, during, or after the benefit game to make a contact and "plant the water safety 'copter seed."

Plan eight. Since the Corps will not let you fly in the helicopter, there is no regulation about a member of the lake's water safety council taking your place in the sky. You could create the background information to chat about, assist the council member with everything but the 'copter ride. This way you will be able to take photos of the member and the traffic pilot for newspaper coverage and for other presentations.

Plan nine. Some politicians are great and will help the water safety cause. They might take your place in the sky or even the politician's press secretary or another staffer. All you need to do is create the history info and what's on the agenda this year.

Plan ten. Retired Corps employees love to volunteer their services for a good cause and water

safety is such a cause. Simply do the same research work, and then contact a retired person who has good voice and diction, and loves to fly. Look around for an old broadcasting PAO, or Visual Illustration retiree. There may be a couple of retired rangers or resource managers or recreation planners from the Natural Resources Branch who would jump at the chance to help the Corps save a life or two. You will be surprised.

This is your mission. Have you thought about which plan you are going to start with to meet the traffic helicopter challenge? Happy "flying"... sky voice.