

SCOTTSDALE REPUBLIC

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SECTION 5R

Hospital's helipad puts safety 1st

By Kate Nolan

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SCOTTSDALE — Sunday's midair collision between two medical helicopters in Flagstaff has led to an investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board, and reassurance by local emergency experts.

Scottsdale Healthcare Osborn boasts one of the busiest emergency helipads in Arizona, and a clean safety record, hospital officials said.

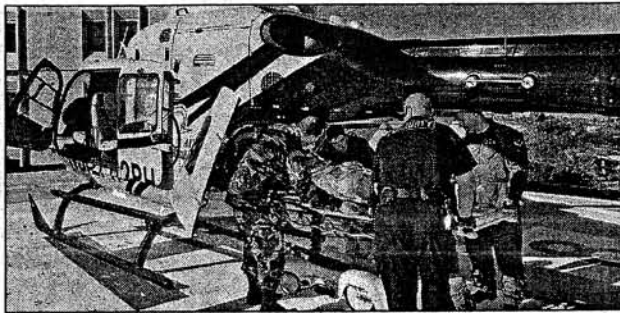
Three rooftop landing pads average six landings a day, with as many as 10 some days.

No accidents have occurred at the helipads, part of a \$28 million emergency center that debuted in 2004 at the hospital at Osborn Road and Drinkwater Boulevard.

An extravagant set-up that is possibly unique for a community hospital, the multiple pads sit on a specially reinforced roof, fitted with an automatic fire-suppression system.

The roof can withstand the weight of three civilian helicopters or that of a huge military Blackhawk helicopter.

Osborn's emergency services direc-



COURTESY OF SCOTTSDALE HEALTHCARE OSBORN

A patient is unloaded recently from an emergency medical evacuation helicopter at Scottsdale Healthcare Osborn by emergency workers.

tor, Nancy Hicks-Arsenault, said such features reduce the danger of collision and increase efficiency during multiple injury emergencies.

"We have the safest helipad out there, according to the helicopter companies. We have additional fire and drainage systems. If a spill from a fuel leak occurred, foam would be activated and carried away through special drains," Hicks-Arsenault said.

Unless patient conditions require "hot offloads," patients are not moved until the engine is shut down, she said.

"We count on very good communication when helicopters are bringing us patients," she said, describing a system

where the hospital sets up immediate radio contact with incoming pilots and puts them in contact with pilots of any other aircraft scheduled to land.

Hospital security provides limited air traffic control, ordering helicopters to hover at a distance if landing isn't immediately possible. Typically, each pilot will fly over before attempting to land.

Despite the safety measures in place, Hicks-Arsenault's staff is taking a warning from the Flagstaff accident.

"Our immediate reaction was one of sadness and grief. All of us will next start second-guessing whether there is anything we can do to improve safety," she said.



SCOTTSDALE HEALTHCARE

Safety at Scottsdale hospital

Scottsdale Healthcare Osborn is one of the Valley's busiest trauma centers. The hospital also is the Valley's only trauma center east of Phoenix. And with three helipads, it is equipped to handle major disasters. In light of Sunday's deadly collision of two medical helicopters in Flagstaff, reporter Kate Nolan looks at what Scottsdale Healthcare is doing to ensure medical helicopter safety. **Page 4**