



# TAKE FIVE...

**for safety**  
Five minutes reading  
could save your life!

## ***Distraction = Danger***

Already in ancient times, Homer described the devastating effects of distraction in the *Odyssey*. To prevent his mariners from being distracted by the song of the Sirens and putting their boat in danger, Odysseus blocked their ears with wax. Nowadays, bus drivers use other strategies to avoid distraction. As a safety measure, and to avoid distracting them, passengers are asked not to speak to bus drivers.

Most of the time, bush and helicopter pilots are alone to carry out all the tasks related to flying the aircraft while, at the same time, they are not isolated from their passengers. Team spirit often leads pilots to interact with passengers. By talking or by bringing their activities on board the aircraft, passengers can become a dangerous source of distraction. As much as possible, pilots must isolate themselves and concentrate on their work by remaining distant. If pilots get involved in their passengers' conversations or activities, their attention is greatly diverted from flying the aircraft. A distracted pilot is no longer able to control the situation, and his/her vigilance, which is essential during an emergency, is compromised. Conversations in flight should be limited to those that are required by the mission at hand—it's a matter of safety. Professional pilots explain this and enforce it from the cockpit. They can take the time to socialize and exchange opinions once they are on the ground.

Here's a classic example of distraction: Imagine the passenger in your helicopter is a geologist. You observe him from the corner of your eye between two "scans" of the instrument panel. You have been flying over a rocky countryside for a good half-hour. Suddenly, he changes colour and yells in the inter-phone to conduct a half-turn toward a heap of pebbles. You carry out the manoeuvre as an excited voice, raving about the mineral beauty of these rocks, resonates through your headset. The enthusiasm overcomes you as well; your wide eyes fixate on these stones and search to find the beauty in them, but you don't see it—you are not a geologist! Suddenly, you regain your composure and you notice, with a sinking stomach and a strident cuss, that you are at 100 ft AGL with a tailwind and no airspeed. You have put yourself and your passengers in a dangerous situation. You alone are responsible. You let yourself become distracted! You are very lucky if this story has a happy ending. Unfortunately, many fatal accidents (for example, collisions with power lines) have pilot distraction as a causal factor.

Other dangerous forms of pilot distraction include spilled coffee in the cockpit, problems with an instrument, or a passenger who is not feeling well. The pilot diverts his/her attention to the problem while the flight continues with no real control. The longer the flight continues at a low altitude, the more likely it is that this distraction could have disastrous results because the room to manoeuvre is reduced. Pilots, beware of the song of the Sirens!

