

accordance with Piaggio Alert Service Bulletin No. ASB-80-0164, Original Issue: September 10, 2001. The procedures for accomplishing the optional modification of this AD are contained in Piaggio Service Bulletin (Recommended) No. SB-80-0165, Original Issue: September 10, 2001. The Director of the Federal Register approved this incorporation by reference under 5 U.S.C. 552(a) and 1 CFR part 51. You may get copies from Piaggio Aero Industries S.p.A, Via Cibrario 4, 16154 Genoa, Italy; telephone: +39 010 6481 856; facsimile: +39 010 6481. You may view copies at the FAA, Central Region, Office of the Regional Counsel, 901 Locust, Room 506, Kansas City, Missouri, or at the Office of the Federal Register, 800 North Capitol Street, NW., Suite 700, Washington, DC.

Note 3: The subject of this AD is addressed in Italian AD Number 2001-513, dated November 30, 2001.

(i) *When does this amendment become effective?* This amendment becomes effective on April 11, 2003.

Issued in Kansas City, Missouri, on February 10, 2003.

Michael Gallagher,

Manager, Small Airplane Directorate, Aircraft Certification Service.

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Aviation Administration

14 CFR Part 39

[Docket No. 2001-SW-45-AD; Amendment 39-13053; AD 2003-04-05]

RIN 2120-AA64

Airworthiness Directives; Robinson Helicopter Company Model R44 Helicopters

AGENCY: Federal Aviation Administration, DOT.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: This amendment adopts a new airworthiness directive (AD) for Robinson Helicopter Company (RHC) Model R44 helicopters that requires inspecting the tail rotor pitch control assembly for roughness or binding of the pitch control bearings (bearings) by hand-rotating the pitch control bearing housing (housing). If the housing does not rotate freely, the AD requires replacing the unairworthy pitch control assembly with an airworthy unit. This amendment is prompted by reports of failure of the tail rotor pitch control assembly due to improperly lubricated bearings on the RHC Model R22 helicopters. Although there have been no reported failures on the RHC Model R44 helicopters, the design of the tail

rotor pitch control assembly makes it susceptible to the same failures as have occurred on the Model R22 helicopters. The actions specified by this AD are intended to detect corrosion of the bearings and to prevent bearing failure and subsequent loss of directional control of the helicopter.

DATES: Effective March 26, 2003.

The incorporation by reference of certain publications listed in the regulations is approved by the Director of the Federal Register as of March 26, 2003.

ADDRESSES: The service information referenced in this AD may be obtained from Robinson Helicopter Company, 2901 Airport Drive, Torrance, California 90505, telephone (310) 539-0508, fax (310) 539-5198. This information may be examined at the FAA, Office of the Regional Counsel, Southwest Region, 2601 Meacham Blvd., Room 663, Fort Worth, Texas; or at the Office of the Federal Register, 800 North Capitol Street, NW., suite 700, Washington, DC. **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Fred Guerin, Aviation Safety Engineer, FAA, Los Angeles Aircraft Certification Office, Airframe Branch, 3960 Paramount Blvd., Lakewood, California 90712, telephone (562) 627-5232, fax (562) 627-5210.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: A proposal to amend 14 CFR part 39 to include an AD for the specified helicopters was published in the **Federal Register** on September 10, 2002 (67 FR 57351). That action proposed inspecting the pitch control assembly for roughness or binding of the bearings by hand-rotating the housing and if the housing does not rotate freely, replacing each unairworthy pitch control assembly with an airworthy unit.

The FAA has reviewed RHC Service Bulletin SB-43A, Revision A, dated June 10, 2002 (SB), which describes procedures for inspecting the pitch control assembly for roughness or binding of the bearings by hand-rotating the housing. If the housing does not rotate freely, the SB specifies replacing each unairworthy pitch control assembly, part number (P/N) A031-1, with an airworthy unit in accordance with the maintenance manual.

Interested persons have been afforded an opportunity to participate in the making of this amendment. Due consideration has been given to the comments received.

One commenter, the manufacturer, requests a change to the summary information to indicate that bearing failures have been reported only on RHC Model R22 helicopters, and there are no reports of failed bearings on Model R44

helicopters. The FAA agrees and has changed the preamble information to indicate that the bearing failures have occurred on the RHC Model R22 helicopters only.

The same commenter requests a change to the summary and the discussion sections to revise the failure sequence to indicate that bearing failure could result in loss of tail rotor thrust requiring a power-off landing. The commenter states that in all three of the bearing failures, the failed bearing caused the pitch control linkage to fail and the tail rotor to go to flat pitch but none of the failures resulted in an accident. The commenter also states that there was no breakup of the tail rotor assembly, no tail rotor contact of the tailboom, and no loss of control resulting in an accident. The FAA agrees that the failed bearing has not resulted in breakup of the tail rotor assembly and contact with the tailboom, and the likelihood of such a breakup and contact with the tailboom may be remote. Therefore, we have removed the reference to the breakup of the tail rotor assembly and contact with the tailboom from the failure sequence. We do not agree that the failure sequence should state that bearing failure could result in loss of tail rotor thrust requiring a power-off landing. The loss of directional control associated with this type of failure could result in loss of control of the helicopter, and a successful power-off landing may not be possible. The term "loss of control of the helicopter", however, may be understood to mean an almost certain catastrophic event, such as loss of cyclic or pitch control. That is not our intent when we use the failure sequence in our AD's. That sequence states what could happen not necessarily what will happen. Our intent is to convey the sequence of events that we intend to prevent by issuing the AD to correct the unsafe condition. Therefore, we have changed the failure sequence to state that loss of "directional" control can result.

After careful review of the available data, including the comments noted above, the FAA has determined that air safety and the public interest require the adoption of the rule as proposed with the changes described previously. The FAA has determined that these changes will neither increase the economic burden on any operator nor increase the scope of the AD.

The FAA estimates that this AD will affect 440 helicopters of U.S. registry, that it will take approximately 2.3 work hours per helicopter to inspect and replace each pitch control assembly, and that the average labor rate is \$60 per