Date: April 2, 2010
To: Kansas Hospital Association Members
From: KANAMSS
Subject: “Helicopter Shopping”

It has come to the attention of this office that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has identified “helicopter Shopping” as a contributing factor in several fatal helicopter EMS (HEMS) accidents.

Helicopter shopping is the practice of requestors calling air ambulance providers one after another in an attempt to find one who will fly in marginal weather conditions, without the requestor sharing the fact of prior refusals by other air ambulance providers. This is a potentially dangerous practice.

Please be advised of the following points:

- If an air ambulance provider has declined a flight because of weather conditions, it is incumbent upon your staff to advise all subsequent providers of the previous flight refusals so the pilot may appropriately assess the risk of flying. The air ambulance providers in Kansas will be asking your dispatchers if any other helicopters have been requested for your incident for that very reason. Your response to this question will also enhance safety if more than one helicopter is responding to a scene request. Communication with each other is vital in keeping multiple helicopters efforts coordinated.
- Air ambulances are invaluable for patients who have time sensitive conditions or need critical interventions, but they are not risk free. Air ambulance transports should be considered when patients need rapid transport with a crucial care team in attendance.

This office is asking that your agency develop a procedure that will ensure that an air ambulance service is notified whenever they are being requested to respond to a call that has been previously refused or aborted by another air ambulance service(s) due to unfavorable weather conditions. We are also asking that the air ambulance programs requested for scene responses be formed whenever more than one helicopter will be participating.

Thank you for your prompt consideration of this matter. Please contact our office for assistance if you have any questions.