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WIND SPEED    CUT COSTS    LOW-LEVEL WINDS    RUNWAY TEMPERATURE FORECASTS

# MXVISION AVIATIONSENTRY®

CASE STUDY

## HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT HELICOPTER PATROL UNIT

HOUSTON, TEXAS

Established in 1970, the Helicopter Patrol Unit of the Houston Police Department has 28 people, eight helicopters, and one airplane. They use three MD 500 helicopters for patrol, and their helicopter fleet also includes two Schweizer 333s, three Schweizer 300s for training, and one Cessna 182 airplane. Long-time officers and helicopter instructor pilots, Larry Kroesche and Steve Lee have been in the unit since 1979 and 1991, respectively.

The Houston Police Department Helicopter Unit maintains a routine patrol of the Houston area, flying 20 hours a day in flights of two hours each, seven days a week. They also respond to high-priority Code 1 calls such as burglaries, missing children, robberies, or a suspect on the ground. In addition, they train their own pilots.

### THE CHALLENGE

To maintain their routine patrols and respond to calls while keeping their staff safe, the Houston Police Department Helicopter Unit needs real-time, location-specific weather information. In addition, because training flights may require longer trips, they also need to forecast and monitor weather information for surrounding cities so they can plan ahead for those flights.

“Weather is our biggest factor out here. Since we’re so close to the coast we need to know everything about the weather,” said Kroesche. “It changes at the drop of a hat. We have so much change with rolling fogs, temperature, dew points, different things — that we can have a lot of weather phenomena which are a potential hazard for our pilots.”

### THE DTN/METEORLOGIX SOLUTION

The Helicopter Unit of the Houston Police Department depends on MxVision AviationSentry® *Helicopter Edition* for the latest weather information. They have had the system for over a year, having switched to it because it offers more functionality than the competitor’s system they had previously used. “MxVision AviationSentry *Helicopter Edition* is more up-to-date and it offers a more advanced, user-friendly system than what we were using before,” said Lee.

### RESULTS

“With MxVision AviationSentry *Helicopter Edition*, rather than having to call flight service and be put on hold, we can get instantaneous viewing of a certain thunderstorm coming our direction,” said Kroesche. “A lot of times, if we have a front coming in, we can call back our patrol units and put them in the hangar before the weather hits,” he said.

When weather keeps them down, they simply have to wait. “We’re basically an aerial platform for the officers on the streets,” said Kroesche.



If they get a priority dispatch, they can react quickly. "We can instantly check the weather via MxVision AviationSentry *Helicopter Edition* and, weather permitting, get the guys launched right away," said Kroesche. "So, it's basically a lot quicker response time for us."

They found the real-time weather information especially valuable when they were dealing with hurricane season. "When Katrina was coming in, people didn't know where it was heading, and MxVision AviationSentry *Helicopter Edition* kept us abreast of activity," said Lee. They monitored Katrina via MxVision AviationSentry *Helicopter Edition* to determine when to evacuate their helicopters and take them to a more protected area.

"We were able to wait until the very end to move our aircraft," said Kroesche, explaining that they wanted to avoid leaving the city unprotected by their patrol.

"The real-time weather information really helps us because it allows us to do things or shut down operations at the very last minute or to get aircraft in the air at the earliest possible minute," he said.

Because they do all pilot training in-house on commercial helicopters, they also depend on the forecasting information that MxVision AviationSentry *Helicopter Edition* provides when planning the required 150-mile minimum cross-country flights. "We can check a week ahead and, if we have good weather, we can go on a cross-country flight," said Lee.

## THE CLIENT'S VIEW

"We have 700 square miles within the city that we cover. So with the real-time function that MxVision AviationSentry *Helicopter Edition* provides, we're able to get back and not get caught in the weather. The real time weather information really helps us."

Larry Kroescher, helicopter unit officer and instructor pilot, Houston Police Department

*DTN/Meteorlogix, DTN's brand of commercial weather services, delivers industry-specific weather management capabilities for its customers to manage business risks, maximize personal safety and minimize financial loss.*

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