HAI ADDRESSES PANDEMIC ISSUES RELATED TO HOLDING HAI HELI-EXPO 2021 IN NEW ORLEANS

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Helicopter Association International remains committed to supporting the vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) industry by holding an in-person HAI HELI-EXPO 2021 in New Orleans March 22–25, with exhibits open March 23–25.

"I want to be as transparent as possible in addressing the concerns of our industry," says James Viola, president and CEO of HAI. "By partnering with the staff of the convention center, the city, and local businesses to mitigate the risks for HAI HELI-EXPO participants, we believe we can achieve a safe environment for the show. Please visit the COVID-19 webpage on the heliexpo.com website to see all the health and safety protocols that we will have in place in New Orleans. Masks, social distancing, frequent cleanings—these are only the tip of the spear in our risk management plan.

"The State of Louisiana has approved our trade show event—the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center has more than 1.1 million square feet of exhibit space alone, so even with social distancing, it holds a lot of people. The only thing that will prevent us from holding HAI HELI-EXPO this March is if the New Orleans area is in a Phase One lockdown at that time," says Viola.

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HAI has also consulted closely with Dr. Allison Stock, an epidemiologist formerly with the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC), who is working with the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans on health and safety issues.

“Convention center staff have undergone specific sanitation training as part of the Global Biorisk Advisory Council (GBAC) STAR accreditation, which certifies that the convention center meets the industry’s highest standards of infectious disease prevention,” says Dr. Stock. “We are also working with HAI to make sure their on-site protocols and processes will meet the health and safety guidelines of the CDC and state and local public health authorities.

“While we are in Phase One with tighter restrictions right now, that is scheduled to expire on Jan. 29. I fully expect that we will be able to host a show like HAI HELI-EXPO in March,” added Dr. Stock.

“Working with people like Dr. Stock and the rest of the staff at the convention center has made our risk assessment and hazard mitigation process much easier,” continues Viola. “We also expect HAI HELI-EXPO attendees to do their part. We will insist on compliance with all health and safety guidelines by all participants.”

However, Viola acknowledges that traveling to New Orleans for the show will be difficult for some. International travel is restricted, and some exhibitors—including some larger companies—have canceled. “Travel at this time is a very personal decision,” says Viola. “I think each person has the right to make that decision for themselves and for their company. For those who can’t make it, we understand, and we’ll see them next year.

“But we still have hundreds of companies and thousands of attendees who expect to attend, exhibit, or participate in education or industry meetings,” says Viola. “We know attendance at this show will be lower than usual, but we expect that many in our industry will still come to New Orleans in order to conduct the business necessary to keep their employees working and their companies moving ahead.”

Viola sees HAI’s commitment to hold the show as part of its commitment to its membership. “I’ll be blunt: holding the show under these conditions will be a financial loss for HAI, but it’s also a sound, practical, and necessary investment in our members and the industry,” Viola says.

“Our industry needs this boost right now, and it has always been our responsibility to help our members keep their rotors turning,” says Viola. “The doors of HAI HELI-EXPO will be open to those who want to buy or sell, receive training, look for a new job, or just network with their industry peers. I hope to see you there.”

16 JANUARY 2021

ARTICLE LINK:
https://mfa.50skyshades.com/news/events-festivals/hai-addresses-pandemic-issues-related-to-holding-hai-heli-expo-2021-in-new-orleans

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