

July 4th, 2012 – NO **INDEPENDENCE DAY** FOR THE EAST END

Reproduced from Newsday

Originally published: July 3, 2012 7:39 PM Updated: July 3, 2012 10:29 PM

By EMILY NGO

A federal rule restricting helicopter traffic along Long Island's North Shore are to go into effect early next month with over-water routes intended to reduce chopper noise in residential areas.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Tuesday published the rule mandating a route that has been voluntary since 2008. The regulation requires pilots to fly 1 mile offshore between Huntington and Orient Point, with a minimum altitude of 2,500 feet. Pilots who don't stick to the new route face an unspecified civil penalty or suspension or revocation of their licenses, according the 39-page rule. It allows for deviations from the route only for safety or weather-related reasons.

"It's a historic step that will take us from the Wild West of the skies to a new era of regulation that will provide relief," Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) said Tuesday. Schumer, who has pushed federal officials to make the route restriction mandatory, said his mission to reduce noise caused by "helicoptering to the Hamptons" from Manhattan is not over. He said he hopes choppers will eventually be required to fly around the East End en route to the Hamptons.

The new regulation does not include limits on how helicopters approach the Hamptons from the North Shore flight path.

The North Shore rule "is a really important first step to giving us our sanity back," Brookhaven Democratic Party chairman and former state Assemb. Marc Alessi said.

Schumer and other officials announced the new regulation during a news conference at the Smithtown home of Craig Cooper, 58, a video and event producer who wrote to the senator in 2006 about "persistent, deafening noise" from helicopters.

The Eastern Region Helicopter Council, a pilots' organization, said in a statement that the mandate would lead to an increase in choppers on a "permanent, highly concentrated and condensed flight pattern," exacerbating the noise problem for North Shore residents. The group Tuesday cited a 360-percent increase in noise complaints it received since voluntarily agreeing to the over-water route in 2008. The rule forced helicopters to "fly over the same houses again and again," the group said.

Council chairman Jeff Smith urged Schumer and the Federal Aviation Administration to scrap the "counterproductive North Shore rule" and join the group in finding another solution.

"We don't want to destroy the industry," North Hempstead Supervisor Jon Kaiman said. "What we want to do is preserve quality of life." The North Shore rule will be in effect for two years, after which it could be made permanent or modified.

The regulation is to be published Friday in the Federal Register, a daily digest of notices from federal agencies, presidential documents and executive orders. The rule will go into effect 30 days later.