WASHINGTON, Sept. 18, 2013 /PRNewswire-iReach/ -- Columbia Helicopters has taken delivery of its first simulator for pilot training, following a two-year search and product evaluation.

"We are a growing company, and need the additional training capacity that a simulator of our own would provide," explained Chris Gage, the Portland-based company's chief pilot. "Although we have used local flight schools in the past, we prefer not to outsource. The new simulator gives us ready access to a training device, enabling us to build upon our own training procedures."

The simulator, which has been on-site at Columbia's Aurora Airport headquarters since September 10, is an advanced fixed base aviation training device, built by ELITE Simulation Solutions of Dubendorf, Switzerland, under the ELITE Evolution brand. The simulator emulates the Eurocopter AS 350 helicopter cockpit, and has US FAA, European EASA, and Australian CASA approval.

Gage reported that that while it is not type specific to Columbia's fleet, which currently includes the Boeing Vertol 234 and 107 model aircraft, the simulator has a similar cockpit configuration with dual pilot controls and instrumentation. "For the price point, it is the perfect system for us," he said.

The simulator will be used primarily for instrument training, including inadvertent instrument meteorological conditions (IIMC) training, as well as crew resource management (CRM) procedures. "The FAA requires 40 hours of instrument training for a helicopter pilot, but we can do the first 20 hours of that in the simulator," Gage said. "This means we can do more training on the ground, rather than in the helicopter, which has a high cost per flight hour."

The simulator can also be used for engine and instrument failure mode and emergency procedures training, which are harder and riskier to perform in an actual aircraft.

"Given the experience of the pilots we hire, we are trying to train in procedures at our level—not how to fly," said Gage.

Columbia Helicopters is a global heavy lift specialist focusing on logistical support, construction, and aerial firefighting. It is a member of the American Helicopter Services And Aerial Firefighting Association (AHSAFA), the Washington-based trade association representing the private aerial firefighting industry.

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