

Safety News

Fatigue-Fighting Proposals

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has proposed a new rule to help prevent commercial pilots from flying while fatigued.

The proposal would establish new limitations for flight and duty time, and new rest requirements — all based on fatigue science, the FAA said.

“After years of debate, the aviation community is moving forward to give pilots the tools they need to manage fatigue and fly safely,” said FAA Administrator Randy Babbitt, noting that updated rules are needed because of changes in the operations of the global aviation system.

The FAA said the proposed rule would establish a nine-hour “minimum opportunity for rest” before a duty period begins; current rules prescribe an eight-hour period.

The proposal also would “establish a new method for measuring a pilot’s rest period so that the pilot can have the chance to receive at least eight hours of sleep during the rest period,” the FAA said. “Cumulative fatigue would be addressed by placing weekly and 28-day limits on the amount of time a pilot may be assigned any type of duty. Additionally, 28-day and annual limits would be placed on flight time.”

Under the proposed rules, air carriers could not assign pilots to work if they are fatigued; fatigued pilots also would be prohibited from accepting a work assignment.

“In addition,” the FAA said, “a company employee who suspects a pilot of being too fatigued to perform his or her duties during flight would be able to report that information to the air carrier so that the air carrier could make a determination of whether or not the pilot is too fatigued to fly.”



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The notice of proposed rule making, published in September, will be subject to public comment for 60 days. The FAA said it will issue a final rule by Aug. 1, 2011.

Pilot fatigue has been an issue for years, but the FAA designated it as a top priority after the Feb. 12, 2009, crash of a Colgan Air Bombardier Q400 during approach to Buffalo-Niagara International Airport in Buffalo, New York, U.S. All 49 people in the airplane and one person on the ground were killed, and the airplane was destroyed (ASW, 3/10, p. 20).

The U.S. National Transportation Safety Board said the probable cause of the crash was the captain’s inappropriate response to a stick shaker activation, which resulted in an unrecoverable stall. Fatigue was cited as a likely factor, although accident investigators said they could not determine the extent to which the crew’s performance was affected by fatigue.

Harmonized Pilot Licensing

The European Aviation Safety Agency has proposed regulatory changes to extend the same pilot licensing requirements to all states represented in the European Commission (EC).

The proposal was the subject of public comments from June 2008 until February 2009. It ultimately will be adopted by the EC, and will become law by April 2012.

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Category 1 for Nigeria

Nigeria has earned a Category 1 safety rating from the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), which means that its civil aviation authority meets the safety standards set forth by the International Civil Aviation Organization.

The rating, awarded under the FAA International Aviation Safety Assessment (IASA) Program, followed a July review of Nigeria’s civil aviation authority. Air carriers in countries with Category 1 status may apply to operate flights to and from the United States.

Harold Demuren, director general of the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority, led the agency in a multi-year effort to upgrade the country’s aviation safety record. The effort began after a string of fatal accidents in 2006.

“Not only has the effort resulted in Nigeria becoming the first African country in decades to achieve a new Category 1 rating, it also greatly improved Nigeria’s aviation safety record,” Flight Safety Foundation President and CEO William R. Voss said.



Adrian Pingstone/Wikimedia

New Magazine

The AviAssist Foundation — the regional affiliate of Flight Safety Foundation for East and Southern Africa — has published the first issue of *SafetyFocus*, its quarterly journal on African aviation safety.



The magazine is a spinoff of *AeroSafety World*, and more than 750 African aviation safety professionals "are now benefitting from the ASW wealth of articles," said Tom Kok, director of AviAssist.

"By reaching out for industry support in the form of advertising, we are making this information available largely for free," Kok said. "Access to safety information should not be limited by the bandwidth of your connection or your ability to pay."

Expanded Blacklist

The European Commission's list of airlines banned from operating in the European Union has been expanded to include Meridian Airways, registered in Ghana.

The updated blacklist also placed restrictions on a second Ghanaian airline — Airlift International — which will be permitted to operate only one of its four aircraft into the European Union.

The list now includes nearly all carriers from 17 countries — although exceptions have been granted for 10 operators. In addition, the list bans five air carriers headquartered in other countries, and limits the operations of 10 additional carriers.



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"We cannot afford any compromise in air safety," said Siim Kallas, European Commission vice president responsible for mobility and transport. "Where we have evidence that air carriers are not performing safe operations or where the regulatory authorities fail in their obligation to enforce the safety standards, we must act to ... exclude any risks to safety."

Proposed Penalty

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has proposed the largest civil penalty in agency history — \$24.2 million — against American Airlines for allegedly failing to comply with an airworthiness directive calling for specific inspections of wiring on McDonnell Douglas MD-80s.

The FAA said that American "did not follow steps outlined in a 2006 airworthiness directive requiring operators to inspect wire bundles located in the wheel wells of MD-80 aircraft."

Under Airworthiness Directive (AD) 2006-15-15, operators were required to conduct "a general visual inspection by March 5, 2008, for chafing or signs of arcing of the wire bundle for the auxiliary hydraulic pump." Corrective actions also were prescribed.

The FAA said the actions required by the AD were intended to prevent wires near the auxiliary hydraulic pump from shorting or arcing, which could cause a loss of auxiliary hydraulic power or a wheel well fire. The AD also was intended to "reduce the potential of an ignition source adjacent to the fuel tanks, which, in combination with the flammable vapors, could result in a fuel tank explosion," the FAA said.



Renee Schwietzke/Wikimedia

The FAA said that it discovered the violations during March 25, 2008, inspections of two American Airlines MD-80s. In subsequent inspections, the FAA identified eight more MD-80s that did not comply with the AD. The airline began grounding all of its MD-80s on April 7, 2008, "to conduct new inspections and redo work as necessary," the FAA said.

The FAA concluded that American operated 286 of its MD-80s on a total of 14,278 passenger flights while the aircraft were not in compliance with regulations.

The airline has 30 days from its receipt of the penalty letter to respond to the FAA.

Quality Control

The in-flight shutdown of an engine on a Japan Air Commuter DHC-8 has prompted the Japan Transport Safety Board (JTSB) to recommend improved quality control in the production of an engine gear shaft.

The JTSB said that Transport Canada should take steps to ensure that Pratt & Whitney Canada (PWC), which manufactured the engine, makes "companywide efforts, including the management of the metal stock supplier and component manufacturer serving PWC, toward the improved quality control concerning the production of the RGB [reduction gearbox] helical input gear shaft."

In making its recommendation, the JTSB cited a March 25, 2009, incident in which the DHC-8 crew heard an "abnormal noise" after takeoff from Tanegashima Airport and noted instrument indications of an engine failure. They shut down the no. 1 engine and conducted an emergency landing at Kagoshima Airport.



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Fatigue failure of the RGB helical input gear shaft was "highly probable," according to the JTSB report on the incident.

The agency said that the incident should be "reassessed from the viewpoint of the safety of the entire aircraft, and safety improvement actions should be taken if the results of the reassessment indicate this to be necessary."

'Line Up and Wait'

Because of an official change in terminology, air traffic controllers at U.S. airports are about to begin telling pilots to "line up and wait" when it's time to taxi onto a runway to await takeoff clearance. The change takes effect Sept. 30.

The words "line up and wait" are prescribed by International Civil Aviation Organization guidelines and have been in use throughout the world. In the United States, however, controllers have used the phrase "position and hold."

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said that a safety analysis performed by the agency's Air Traffic Organization Terminal Services found that using "line up and wait" would "eliminate confusion, particularly among pilots who also fly overseas, and further reduce the risk of runway incursions."

The FAA said that the complete instruction to pilots will include the aircraft call sign, the departure runway and "line up and wait."

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In Other News ...

Regardless of regulatory requirements, all aircraft should be equipped with at least one portable **fire extinguisher** "in a place that is accessible to pilots," the Civil Aviation Safety Authority of Australia (CASA) says. The hand-held extinguishers should be "capable of controlled flow" and capable of being operated by a single person, CASA says. ... The U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is repeating its recommendation that the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration require **separate seats** for all aircraft passengers, including children under age 2 who currently may be held on an adult's lap. These children "should be afforded the same level of protection as all other persons aboard air carrier airplanes," the NTSB said. ... Nearly half of all fatal general aviation accidents result from **poor planning** and decision making by pilots, according to a study by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau. Among the examples are failure to reject a takeoff despite poor engine performance and failure to check weather forecasts.

Compiled and edited by Linda Werfelman.