

Auditing Human

BY DAROL HOLSMAN

Looking at how aviation departments managed their operational personnel, the Flight Safety Foundation (FSF) Audit team found that 14 of the 20 departments audited — 70 percent — had no administrative tracking of crew duty or rest deviations from flight operations manual (FOM) standards.

The team recommended that the departments develop a deviation tracking form to record all FOM exceptions and require its use by all staff and line personnel. The forms

should be available and compiled at one designated location such as the scheduling office. Staff at that location would track all crew duty or rest deviations caused by corporate requirements.

The department should review deviation reports quarterly to verify that nonstandard operations are not becoming the norm in operations planning, and, if the deviations become excessive, evaluate the FOM standards for possible revision.



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Management

Operators in seven of the audits — 35 percent — did not have any days off or vacations scheduled in advance, a situation that adversely affects the staff's quality of life.

The FSF Audit Team recommended that the departments analyze their pilot requirements for the flight operation and determine if existing manpower meets the scheduling requirements. If not, sufficient pilots should be hired to meet those requirements.

In conducting this analysis, consideration should be given to training, vacation, days off and illness for all personnel. Vacation plans should be submitted six to 12 months in advance. On the other hand, the department should provide advance notice of scheduled days off to enhance the quality of life for crewmembers. Finally, at the end of the year, management should assess the staff's opinion of the effectiveness of the scheduling process.

Operators did not make full use of the capability of their computer-based scheduling program in seven of the 20 audits.

Departments should evaluate the full capability of the computer-based scheduling program, the team recommended, and analyze the specific needs of the flight operations to determine if the existing scheduling program can be used to meet requirements.

Once a good program is found in place or is obtained, the department should use the scheduling program to

develop management reports and to alert the scheduling office when pilots do not meet recent flight experience requirements, are due for a check ride and when scheduling conflicts exist. Training programs for department personnel should be coordinated by the scheduling office to maximize the use of the computer-based scheduling program.

In 40 percent of the audits — eight departments — the team found that the operator had not developed a consistent pattern of pilot line checks or standardization checks.

The only effective means for an operator to verify the implementation of standard operating procedures (SOPs) is through the use of a third pilot observing the cockpit activities. The industry best practice is to conduct annual pilot line or standardization checks.

Line or standardization checks should be recorded on an appropriate form, with both the examiner and the evaluated pilot signing the form. The form should be filed in the pilot's training record. The FSF Audit Team also suggested that departments consider conducting line or standardization checks while observing pilots in a simulator.

In seven departments — 35 percent of the total — the team found either a lack of aircraft type-specific SOPs or SOPs that were not fully developed.

The development and implementation of SOPs is a proven safety

enhancement program that all operators should adopt. The SOPs should define each critical step and pilot action during the operation of an aircraft, from preflight to postflight.

The Audit Team recommended that departments contact other operators of the type of aircraft in their company's fleet to determine if they have developed SOPs that can be used to guide the development of in-house SOPs. Some OEM pilot handbooks can serve as valuable resources for SOPs, the audit team believes.

Specific aircraft-type SOPs should be published as a separate appendix in the FOM.

Pilots should be trained on SOPs during their initial training in an aircraft and closely monitored for their adherence to the standards during pilot check rides. ●

This article extends the discussion of the aviation department problems most frequently found by the FSF Audit Team, based on the final reports submitted to clients that contracted for operational safety audits during 2004, detailing the observations, findings and recommendations identified during the review (Aviation Safety World, Sept. 2006, page 46). Observations are documented policies, procedures and practices that exceed the industry best practices; findings identify areas in which the team advises the client to adopt better policies, procedures or practices to parallel industry best practices; and recommendations describe actions that could be taken by the client to meet industry best practices. The recommendations cited in this story are the opinions of the FSF Audit Team.