

ANOTHER BRICK IN The Wall

I had the pleasure of recently attending a conference on fatigue risk management systems (FRMS) in Mexico City. It is gratifying to watch these systems mature and be put into use by operators around the world. There is no question that fatigue is a major risk that must be managed, but I think it is important to understand how these systems fit into the context of other safety systems and programs being implemented globally.

The unfortunate truth is that people, in their enthusiasm, sometimes see new initiatives such as FRMS providing the answer to everything. Whatever else was in place is put aside, and everybody chases after the new thing.

That isn't how the safety business is supposed to work. It is too easy to forget that we are supposed to make the system safe by building layers of protection. Just because somebody suggests we build a new layer doesn't mean we have to tear the others down.

Let's look at FRMS in that context. New standards and guidance materials are set to roll out of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Both the U.S. and Europe are working on rule making. Other countries such as Australia and New Zealand have years of experience. Safety managers around the world will soon have everything they need to build another important layer of protection into the system. This is great as long as it is treated as another safety layer or program and not as a substitute for a broader safety management system (SMS).

Consider what FRMS can and can't do: Fatigue risk management systems *can* predict the

risk of fatigue affecting the operation; FRMS can help managers find ways to reduce fatigue risk; and FRMS may even identify practical rostering solutions that will improve safety without putting the company out of business. In a world full of overworked and overstressed operators, I believe FRMS will be a real lifesaver.

Let's consider next what FRMS *can't* do. FRMS alone can't help you manage the risk of an airplane crashing. If you dispatch a flight to a destination with difficult terrain, bad weather, at night, with a non-precision approach flown by a crew that does not know the airport, then you have a pretty high risk of a controlled flight into terrain (CFIT) accident. FRMS will not tell you how to fix that situation. It only can tell you if the fatigue level of the crew is likely to make the situation better or worse, information that is only one piece of the safety puzzle.

So now that this latest safety advancement is being laid at our feet, I say we need to use it as it is intended, to shore up our safety defenses where they have been weak. It is time to treat fatigue as a serious threat. It is a killer that deserves the same attention we give to CFIT, approach and landing accidents and the weather. By building FRMS into our SMS we can manage this silent threat in a way that both makes sense and saves lives.



William R. Voss
President and CEO
Flight Safety Foundation

