

SUPPORT YOUR LOCAL Regulator

I spent time as an observer at the recent International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Assembly and came away with interesting data regarding the status of safety oversight around the world. ICAO since 1996 has been auditing contracting states' compliance with ICAO standards. To ICAO's credit, a couple of things have happened recently. First, there has been a big — and painful — move toward public disclosure of some audit data. Second, in 2005, ICAO moved beyond just reviewing compliance with standards to implement a powerful new audit that assesses a nation's overall ability to oversee its industry.

At the Assembly, ICAO shared summary data from the first 53 states to go through this new audit. While these states represent only a 28 percent sample, this is a nice cross-section of different-sized administrations and geographic locations. The data confirm what many of us have been worried about for a long time: Embarking on a great aviation industry expansion, we are building on a very fragile safety oversight foundation.

These audits clearly show a shortage of qualified people. The report says, "With respect to aircraft operations, approximately half of the audited states have an insufficient number of flight operations inspectors to adequately perform safety oversight of civil aviation activities. Often, this insufficient number of inspectors is due to the fact that a flight operations inspector's remuneration is not favorable when compared with corresponding remuneration in the aviation industry."

The report goes on to say, "Forty percent of the states do not adequately review and approve a prospective air operator's training manual before granting an air operator certificate, including the training manuals for flight and cabin crewmembers and for aircraft dispatchers/flight operations

officers." That is pretty basic stuff, and it is not getting done.

Here is another tough finding: "Approximately 62 percent of states audited do not formally include the airworthiness inspection division in the approval of an air operator certificate or the associated specific operational approval." And just to drive the point home, here is one more thing that none of us want to hear: "Concerning aircraft operations, 68 percent of the audited states have not developed a formal surveillance program to monitor air operators' compliance with national regulations and international standards."

True, safety actually happens in the airline and on the flight line, but let's remember that safety is also a partnership. High levels of safety are not sustainable without high levels of safety oversight. The ICAO report drove this home with a statistical analysis correlating accident rates with a region's lack of effective implementation in oversight functions, licensing, surveillance and resolution of safety deficiencies. The relationship proved to be extraordinarily strong.

Around the world, people are putting together strategies to maintain safety in the face of extraordinary growth. If those strategies do not explicitly provide for a healthy and competent regulatory authority, they are doomed to fail. It sometimes may be difficult, but remember to support your local regulator.



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