

Dealing With Depression

U.S. pilots who take medication for depression may, under certain circumstances, be eligible for the special issuance of medical certificates from the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

The new policy, which took effect April 5, replaces a previous FAA position that prohibited pilots from flying if they took antidepressants.

“We need to change the culture and remove the stigma associated with depression,” said FAA Administrator Randy Babbitt. “Pilots should be able to get the medical treatment they need so they can safely perform their duties.”

Under the new policy, pilots who take one of four antidepressant medications — fluoxetine (Prozac), sertraline (Zoloft), citalopram (Celexa) or escitalopram (Lexapro) — will be permitted to fly “if they have been

satisfactorily treated on the medication for at least 12 months.” Other antidepressants eventually may be added to the list, the FAA said.

When a pilot requests treatment for depression, he or she will be grounded “until all symptoms of the psychiatric condition being treated are improved by the single medication and the pilot is stable for 12 months,” the FAA said.

The FAA said it would give pilots six months to “share any previously non-disclosed diagnosis of depression or the use of these antidepressants” without taking civil enforcement action against them. If they have been treated successfully, they should be flying again in a few months, the FAA said.

The FAA’s new stand conforms to recommendations from the International Civil Aviation Organization and the Aerospace Medical Association and



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resembles policies already put in place by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority of Australia, Transport Canada and the U.S. Army.

Expanding Blacklist

All air carriers from Sudan and the Philippines have been added to the European Commission blacklist of airlines prohibited from operating within the European Union (EU).

The carriers were added in the 13th update of the list, adopted in late March, because of the International Civil Aviation Organization’s (ICAO’s) assessments of aviation safety oversight in those two countries.

“Safety comes first,” said European Commission Vice President Siim Kallas, who is responsible for transport. “We are

ready to support countries that need to build up technical and administrative capacity to guarantee the necessary standards in civil aviation, but we cannot accept that airlines fly into the EU if they do not fully comply with international safety standards.”

The commission imposed restrictions on Iran Air’s operations in the EU because of “evidence of serious incidents and accidents ... and insufficient oversight from the authority over the past year.”

Under the updated list, Air Koryo, licensed in North Korea, has been permitted to resume operations in the EU with two airplanes that are equipped with “the necessary equipment to comply with mandatory international standards and following appropriate oversight by its authority.”

The commission said it recognized improvements within TAAG Angola Airlines and would permit the carrier to operate with specific airplanes and under specific conditions to all EU destinations. Previously, it was permitted to operate only to Lisbon.

The blacklist bans all carriers from 17 countries — a total of 278 carriers — from operating in the EU, along with three carriers from other countries whose operations are banned throughout the EU. In addition, 10 carriers are permitted to operate only under specific conditions.



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Civil Penalties

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has proposed a \$1.45 million civil penalty against Northwest Airlines for allowing some of its Boeing 757s to be operated without proper inspections of windshield wiring. The agency also proposed smaller civil penalties against two other operators.

The FAA said that in the Northwest case, airline maintenance instructions written in 1990 did not mention the need for inspections of wires under the first officer's window, as discussed in an FAA airworthiness directive (AD) that required inspections to check for undersized wires in window heating systems. As a result, 32 airplanes were not in compliance with the AD when they were flown on more than 90,000 passenger flights between Dec. 1, 2005, and May 27, 2008.

On May 28, 2008, the airline discovered that the inspections had not been performed and revised its maintenance instructions to require that the work be performed at the next scheduled overnight layover. The FAA said the work should have been performed before any additional flights.

"When an air carrier realizes that an [AD] is not being followed, the problem must be corrected immediately," FAA Administrator Randy Babbitt said. "Safety cannot wait for the next scheduled maintenance."

In a separate action, the FAA proposed a \$380,000 penalty against Frontier Airlines for operating some of its Airbus A318s and A319s with



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outdated placards depicting how to operate emergency overwing exits. The FAA also proposed a \$260,000 penalty against ERA Helicopters for returning one of its helicopters to service without the required test flights and other checks.

Each operator was given 30 days from its receipt of the civil penalty letter to respond to the FAA.

Blacklist Critique

The African Airlines Association (AFRAA) has criticized the European Commission's blacklist for doing little to help improve aviation safety in Africa.

"While the EU [European Union] list may be well-intended, its main achievement has been to undermine international confidence in the African airline industry," AFRAA Secretary General Nick Fadugba said. "The ultimate beneficiaries of the ban are European airlines which dominate the African skies."

If the international aviation community believes a list is necessary, it should be published by the International Civil Aviation Organization, which has a "known track record of impartiality," he said.

Of the 17 countries with airlines affected by the ban on operations within the EU, 13 — with a total of 111 airlines — are in Africa. Many of those airlines are not operational, or have never operated scheduled flights to Europe, have no plans to do so and "have no aircraft with the range to fly to any EU state," the AFRAA said.



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A plume of volcanic ash fills the skies near Iceland's Eyjafjallajökull Volcano. The ash cloud grounded aircraft for days and prompted efforts to define safe levels of operation during future volcanic eruptions.

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Controller Hiring Faulted

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) does not effectively screen or train new air traffic controllers, assigning some to the nation's busiest air traffic control facilities before they are capable of handling the job, according to a report by the Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General.

"FAA's process for selecting and placing new controllers does not sufficiently evaluate candidates' aptitudes because FAA does not effectively use screening test results or consider candidates' [training academy] performance to help determine facility placement," the report said. "As a result, new controller candidates — many of [whom] have no prior air traffic control experience — are being assigned to some of the busiest air traffic control facilities with little consideration of whether they have the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to become certified controllers at those locations."

Managers of the facilities have complained that some new controllers — who have passed training programs — arrive at their assigned air traffic control facilities unprepared for additional training designed specifically for employees of that particular facility, the report said, adding that this



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indicates the FAA must restructure its testing and training procedures.

The report recommended re-evaluation and redesign of the screening test "to consider candidates' skill sets, assign candidates to a facility based on their [training academy] performance and improve its ... training program" by implementing recommendations developed in 2007 by an FAA training and development group. The FAA agreed in part with the report's findings and proposed corrective actions for all recommendations, the report said.



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Polish President Lech Kaczynski and 95 others were killed when his presidential jet — this Tupolev 154M — crashed in dense fog during an approach to Smolensk Air Base in western Russia on April 10. Russian press reports said that the airplane descended below the glideslope while on final approach and struck the ground.

In Other News ...

In response to the transformation of light aircraft cockpits from conventional flight instruments to integrated computerized **glass cockpits**, the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board is recommending changes in pilot training to improve pilot understanding of the advanced technology. ... The Civil Aviation Safety Authority of Australia has begun a review of pilot proficiency records aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of the **flight crew training** and checking system. The project is expected to be completed late in 2011. ... A four-hour outage on Nov. 19, 2009, of the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration's **telecommunications infrastructure** was caused by "errors in network maintenance and monitoring during a telecommunications upgrade," an independent review panel says.

Compiled and edited by Linda Werfelman.