

# Safety News

## Plague of Locusts

Pilots in Australia are being cautioned about the flight risks presented by swarms of locusts.



The insects fly at altitudes as high as 3,000 ft, in swarms of as many as 50 million; individual swarms can cover hundreds of kilometers, the Australian Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) says. They can attract large numbers of birds, increasing the risk of bird strikes.

The density of the insects can reduce visibility when they strike windshields and can make it difficult for pilots to see features on the ground, CASA said. Locusts also can be ingested into engine intakes and pitot tubes, causing damage and making instrument readings unreliable, the agency said.

## 'Terrific Progress' on Runway Incursions

The number of serious runway incursions at U.S. airports in fiscal year 2010 decreased 50 percent from the previous year, transportation officials said.

Six serious runway incursions, including three involving commercial aircraft,



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were recorded in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said. There were 12 serious runway incursions in fiscal 2009, down from 24 in fiscal 2008 — a reflection of what the FAA described as a “steady, significant improvement in runway safety over the last decade.” By comparison, in fiscal 2000, there were 67 serious runway incursions.

“We continue to make terrific progress in the area of runway safety,” said Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood.

“The goal we are working toward is zero runway incursions,” added FAA Administrator Randy Babbitt. “I’m confident that the right combination of education and technology will help get us there.”

The declining numbers of runway incursions have coincided with an FAA effort to enhance runway safety by improving airport signage and markings, as well as pilot training.

## New Rules on Investigations

The European Parliament has voted in favor of a new regulation to “strengthen the independence and effectiveness” of aviation accident investigations throughout the European Union — an action that the European Commission (EC) says will bolster accident-prevention efforts.

The new regulation also will increase cooperation between European accident investigation authorities, provide for a better follow-up to safety recommendations and strengthen the rights of accident victims.

“Efficient and independent investigations of civil aircraft accidents are crucial for aviation safety,” said Siim Kallas, EC

vice president in charge of transportation. “New rules will allow us to improve investigations, but most importantly, better prevent accidents from happening.”

The new regulation will establish the European Network of Civil Aviation Safety Investigation Authorities, which the EC described as a “natural continuation of the existing informal cooperation between air accident investigation bodies of member states. The network will coordinate cooperation between national authorities, advise EU institutions on air safety matters and implement an annual work program covering activities such as the training of investigators or developing a system for sharing investigation resources.”

The regulation also “reconfirms the principle that the sole objective of accident investigation is to prevent future accidents without attributing blame or liability,” the EC said.

“The regulation implements international standards on the protection of sensitive air safety information. In addition, while the regulation will not affect the prerogatives of the national courts and competent judicial authorities of member states, it will ensure that accident investigators have immediate access to evidence material and information which may be relevant for the improvement of aviation safety. Finally, it will require that member states guarantee coordination between accident investigations and judicial proceedings.”



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**Lithium Batteries**

Air carriers operating in the United States are being asked to implement new procedures for safely transporting lithium batteries (*ASW*, 3/10, p. 44).

Although the batteries are classified as Class 9 hazardous materials, most are currently exempt from regulations that require the pilot-in-command to be notified if Class 9 materials are in his or her aircraft.

Tests conducted by the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) showed that lithium batteries possess “particular propagation characteristics” that become apparent if the batteries are overheated.

“Overheating has the potential to create thermal runaway — a chain reaction leading to self-heating and release of a battery’s stored energy,” the FAA said

in Safety Alert for Operators (SAFO) 10017. “In a fire situation, the air temperature in a cargo compartment fire may be above the auto-ignition temperature of lithium. For this reason, batteries that are not involved in an initial fire may ignite and propagate, thus creating a risk of a catastrophic event.”

The FAA recommended that all air carriers ask their customers to provide information on shipping documents to identify bulk shipments of lithium batteries that currently are exempt from such requirements; to stow bulk shipments of lithium batteries, whenever possible, in Class C cargo compartments “or in locations where alternative fire suppression is available”; to “evaluate the training, stowage and communication protocols in your



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operation with respect to the transportation of lithium batteries in the event of an unrelated fire”; and to emphasize careful handling of all Class 9 hazardous materials, including lithium batteries.

**Global Information Exchange**

A new Global Safety Information Exchange is being established to help reduce accident risks and improve aviation safety worldwide.

Partners in the creation of the exchange are the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the European Union, the International Air Transport Association and the U.S. Department of Transportation. Representatives of the four organizations signed a memorandum of understanding in late September declaring their intention to establish the exchange.

“The more effective and widespread sharing of safety information by regulators and industry can help to better identify existing and emerging risks in air transport operations, making it possible to take action before safety issues result in accidents,” said ICAO Secretary General Raymond Benjamin.

The four organizations currently collect and analyze safety information, primarily through accident reports and safety audits, but the information typically is not available to outside organizations.

ICAO said it will coordinate the collection, analysis and exchange of aviation safety information under the new information exchange, and will disseminate the information in the global aviation community. The information will be exchanged “in the most efficient and secure manner possible, taking into consideration existing confidentiality legislation and agreements,” ICAO said.



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**Helicopter Safety Surveillance**

Australian helicopter operators will receive increased attention from regulatory authorities as part of an effort to improve the industry’s safety record, John McCormick, director of aviation safety at the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), says.

McCormick cited data showing that, although helicopters account for 12 percent of all aircraft in Australia, they are involved in 25 percent of accidents.

CASA said recent data indicate that an increased number of applicants for positions as chief helicopter pilot are “failing prior to the actual check flight, with problems including an inability to interpret weather forecasts, poor flight planning and an inability to determine maximum takeoff weight.”

“All these accidents can be prevented by improving training and concentrating on more than just the manipulative skill of the pilot,” McCormick said, adding that CASA also will emphasize flight training “to achieve higher standards for the next generation of rotary pilots.”

## Fire and Smoke Protection

The aviation industry must develop new guidelines to improve aircraft fire protection, fire detection and fire fighting abilities, the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (IFALPA) says.

In a recent position paper, IFALPA called for adoption of a number of recommendations developed in the aftermath of the Sept. 2, 1998, crash of a Swissair McDonnell Douglas MD-11 off the coast of Nova Scotia, Canada. The crash killed all 229 people in the airplane, which was destroyed. The Transportation Safety Board of Canada (TSB) found that the crash resulted from a loss of control caused by a hidden on-board fire.

The organization said that it "believes that the results from the industry initiative on smoke and fire following the ... accident should become industry best practice and be implemented worldwide. ... A follow-up initiative is necessary to develop further industry guidelines to improve safety."

The follow-up initiative should address aircraft design, fire detection and fire fighting, protection of crew and passengers, the effects of new materials and survivability, IFALPA said.

An industry initiative after the crash recommended changes in procedures and checklists for in-flight fire, but some operators have not implemented those recommendations.

"There can be no doubt that the threat posed by in-flight smoke and fire is a serious one," IFALPA said. "This fact alone makes the case for not only the immediate implementation of recommendations made more than seven years ago but also [for] a further review of the threat and effective countermeasures."



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## In Other News ...

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has proposed a \$4.9 million **civil penalty** against Evergreen International Airlines; the FAA says that, on 232 revenue flights, the airline used pilots who were not trained in an FAA-approved training program. Evergreen had 30 days from its receipt of the civil penalty notice to



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respond. ... Eurocopter and Kannad were honored during a conference of aviation industry managers for their development of the Integra helicopter **emergency beacon**, which uses an internal global positioning system receiver and an integrated antenna to transmit distress data that can be detected by search-and-rescue systems.

## Information Sharing

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) plans a data-sharing program enabling airlines to merge voluntary safety information that has been self-reported by pilots and air traffic controllers.

The FAA says the integrated data-sharing system will provide "a more complete picture of the national airspace system by collecting, assessing and reviewing safety events from the perspective of both pilots and air traffic controllers."

United Airlines and its pilots already have agreed to participate in a demonstration program, and the FAA said it expects similar agreements with other airlines in the future.

The program will merge information collected from pilots through United's aviation safety action program (ASAP) and from air traffic controllers through the FAA's air traffic safety action program. Both are voluntary reporting programs designed to encourage employees to report information that might aid in identifying risks that could lead to accidents.

Those hazards are then addressed through corrective actions — not punishment or discipline.

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Compiled and edited by Linda Werfelman.