

BY WAYNE ROSENKRANS

European operators of large business jets¹ can enhance their margin of safety during charter and corporate flights if they voluntarily set a policy and develop operations specifications on the use of flight attendants, an Austrian training specialist says. The temporary European civil aviation requirements now in effect² only specify carrying flight attendants in charter operations when the airplane has a passenger seating configuration of more than 19 passengers; operators are not required to

have a flight attendant for business aviation operations.

Commercial factors and ingrained cultural norms in these aviation segments sometimes have discouraged European companies and regulators from taking flight attendants seriously, says Brigitte Wieselthaler, head of training services at Jet Alliance Flight Training in Bad Vöslau, Austria. Jet Alliance conducts commercial operations using 32 Austrian-registered business jets. Any flight attendant employed by an airplane owner must meet Jet Alliance

training and currency requirements to fly as a crewmember on these aircraft.

Nearly five years after the chartered Bombardier Challenger 600 takeoff overrun accident³ at Teterboro, New Jersey, U.S., the possibility of such scenarios has attracted the attention of European pilot and flight attendant communities, Wieselthaler said. Two pilots and nine passengers mistakenly assumed that a cabin aide — a customer service representative provided by the operator and dressed in a “crew-member-appearing uniform” — was

Old World Habits

Training specialist advocates wider use of flight attendants in European business jet operations.



qualified to conduct the evacuation from the burning aircraft.

Some European crewmembers also are aware that the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration told U.S. charter operators they are responsible for “clearly identifying to passengers those crewmembers who are safety-qualified and those who are not ... [and ensuring that] passengers are aware that non-safety personnel are not trained or qualified to act in a safety-related capacity.” European cabin services often encompass various types of non-safety-qualified personnel — company representatives serving beverages, conducting customer relations or acting as language interpreters, for example — but current cabin safety principles recommend that these non-safety-qualified individuals be distinguished clearly as not equivalent to airline flight attendants, Wiesenthaler said. Of equal concern is that a flight attendant might be relegated to such a role rather than being assigned as a third crewmember, she said.

Getting Started

- Develop a policy on voluntary use of a flight attendant.
- Require a preflight safety briefing of all cabin personnel.
- Implement cabin communication items in pilot checklists.
- Establish company duty time and rest hours for every crewmember.
- Ensure competence on doors, exits and emergency equipment.
- Explain to passengers the flight attendant’s emergency role.
- Prevent misidentification of non-safety-qualified passengers.
- Encourage pilots and flight attendants to express safety concerns.
- Consider cross-training pilots as flight attendants.

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“A ‘company representative’ is more or less a passenger with the right to serve food and drinks,” Wiesenthaler said. “Downgrading a flight attendant is ridiculous, but often has been done because a company representative not recognized as a crewmember doesn’t have the duty-time limitations of a pilot and is not part of the chain of command.”

In the 1990s, Wiesenthaler moved from a job as a handling agent in business aviation at Vienna International Airport to a flight attendant

position with Austrian Airlines, where she worked for nearly seven years. Later, she spent two and a half as a flight attendant for a business aviation operator, mostly flying long-range trips; she then was a classroom trainer. She also worked for a year in flight operations management for another business operator.

“The first eye-opener in my career was my change to airline operations,” Wiesenthaler recalled. “I was impressed by what it means to be a well-trained flight attendant and by my own self-confidence.”

The second eye-opener, when she left the airline, was the weak approach to cabin safety prevailing among some European operators of business jets. “My airline attitudes met old habits that had not really changed in business aviation,” Wiesenthaler said. “I was shocked by the mindset of my colleagues and the management. They stuck to an ‘official’ culture that said it was sufficient having any good-looking person as a so-called ‘flight attendant.’”

Two days after her return to business aviation, a dispatcher called and asked her to fly a 2.5-hour trip from Vienna but provided hardly any details. Declining to answer any questions about the aircraft type, its location, the destination, passenger needs or how to contact the pilots for a pre-flight briefing, the dispatcher reminded her, “Actually, we do not need a flight attendant.”

“I finally found the airplane in a hangar three hours before the flight, but they had not told me exactly how to open the door,” Wiesenthaler said, noting that trial-and-error force against a handle succeeded. “When I entered the airplane, I thought I would have to check the emergency equipment as I had done at the airline. On this airplane, I didn’t know where it was or where it should be. So I used a passenger safety briefing card to find and check the emergency equipment.

“I found the pilots in a nearby restaurant and requested a preflight briefing. They replied, ‘You want what?’ We had turbulence after takeoff but when I told the pilots I had secured the cabin in response, as at the airline, they were deeply uninterested.”

Later, however, the pilots told her, “It would be very good to write down what you did as cabin procedures and get them implemented within the company.” In time, she found more pilots, flight attendants and non-safety-qualified personnel open to discussion of adopting other cabin safety practices based on airline methods.

Setting a policy on flight attendants seems to be gaining acceptance elsewhere, at least based on an uptick in demand for flight attendant training and assignments from clients in Romania, Russia and Ukraine. “The mindset is changing, and it also is good to see that more European cockpit and cabin crews are demanding such training,” Wieselthaler said. “Today, I often train pilots who are operating without a flight attendant, and they are aware they cannot do that much when they have to fly the airplane into challenging airports such as Samedan Airport, St. Moritz, which is located in the Swiss Alps.⁴ They have a lot to do, and may not have enough time to secure the cabin. Nevertheless, they are responsible.”

Communication can break down for lack of flight attendant-related items in the manufacturer’s guidance on flight crew checklists, with no information passed to the flight attendant to prepare for takeoff, for example. “I often have not even known that we were taking off except by hearing the sound of the engines,” she said. “Joint crew resource management procedures and training help. Pilots may have thousands of hours but not one hour in airline operations, and they are not used to working with a flight attendant.”

When no flight attendant can be assigned to a trip, her preferred alternative is formal training for frequent travelers. “We are now trying to invite customers to train with us to get an idea of the duties of the aircraft crew,” she said.

The greatest challenge in this type of flight attendant training is airplane cabin, door and emergency equipment diversity. “We train a flight attendant on one airplane at a time, and do all the training on that airplane; one cabin mockup would not be enough,” she said.

Door exercises require the maintenance department to allow the subject airplane with a

maintenance technician aboard to be repositioned to Vienna, and post-training cabin door checks by the technician later are required to release the airplane to flight operations. “Training devices for all doors and emergency equipment would make training much easier,” Wieselthaler said.

Many customers have not realized that a measure as simple as having a flight attendant aboard improves cabin safety and accident survival, but once educated, they are more amenable to paying for a flight attendant and, alternatively, to participating in training, she added. ➤

Notes

1. Flight Safety Foundation auditors have found that U.S. corporate/charter operators typically consider voluntarily assigning a flight attendant only when they operate a cabin class airplane, and some specify that the third crewmember will be aboard whenever logistically appropriate in an airplane with a wide cabin and flat floor.
2. From July 2008 until a target date of 2012, European Commission Regulation 8/2008 applies to commercial air transport in airplanes for operators based in European Union member states under a law known as EU-OPS 1 on the harmonization of technical requirements and administrative procedures.
3. U.S. National Transportation Safety Board. “Runway Overrun and Collision, Platinum Jet Management, LLC, Bombardier Challenger CL-600-1A11, N370V, Teterboro, New Jersey, February 2, 2005.” Accident Report NTSB/AAR-06/04, Oct. 31, 2006. The accident and its cabin safety ramifications have been discussed in *ASW*, 3/07, p. 30; *ASW*, 10/07, p. 38; and *ASW*, 7/08, p. 40.
4. A fatal runway excursion accident occurred at 1614 local time on Feb. 12, 2009, at this airport involving a Dassault Falcon 100 operated by Laret Aviation. Two pilots were killed and one passenger survived; the airplane was destroyed, according to preliminary information gathered by the Aviation Safety Network.



Wieselthaler

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fire threats,” the CAA report says. An online survey was conducted using a Web page, with cabin crewmembers, flight crewmembers and safety instructors as the majority of respondents. Results were obtained from 66 countries, but because of various factors that made comparisons from different countries problematic, only those from the United Kingdom were analyzed in detail.² All data in this article represent U.K. respondents.

The vast majority, 91 percent, had no experience with in-flight fire; 3 percent had witnessed an in-flight fire; and 6 percent had been involved in fighting an in-flight fire. Most, including 84.4 percent of those without in-flight fire experience and 73.3 percent with in-flight fire experience, said in answer to a survey question that they believed the amount of time spent on theoretical training in fire-fighting was sufficient.

In answer to a question on practical training, 41.4 percent of respondents without in-flight fire experience thought the duration was too short, 56.4 percent thought it was sufficient and 1.5 percent rated it too long. A higher proportion of respondents with in-flight fire experience, 51.4 percent, thought it was too short.

Other questions were based on a rating scale, in which respondents indicated agreement or disagreement with various statements. The scale was from “strongly disagree,” assigned a value of -2, to “strongly agree,” assigned a value of 2. The responses were averaged for each group — those with fire experience and those with no fire experience. The average reflected the group’s overall attitude or perception concerning the statement. For example, an average of 1.5 can be understood as general agreement, although less than strong agreement.

The highest percentages of “agree” responses were for the statement that “the fire training equips cabin crewmembers to extinguish any fire visible in the cabin.” More than 50 percent of the respondents with firefighting experience — the experienced group — and more than 60 percent of those who had no firefighting

experience — the inexperienced group — agreed. In both groups, strong agreement was expressed by about 20 percent.

Less confidence was indicated for more-complex scenarios.

To the statement, “The fire training equips crewmembers to extinguish a fire behind the cabin panels,” the experienced group and the inexperienced group had similar rating averages, 0.41 and 0.4, respectively. That is, both groups agreed to a small extent with the statement.

Similarly, both groups had an overall negative response to the statement, “The fire training equips crewmembers to deal with multiple fires occurring at the same time” (Figure 1). But the experienced group was more dubious.

To the statement, “The training for the management of passengers in the event of in-flight fire is adequate,” the experienced group mildly disagreed with an average of -0.12, while the inexperienced group agreed weakly, with an average of 0.23.

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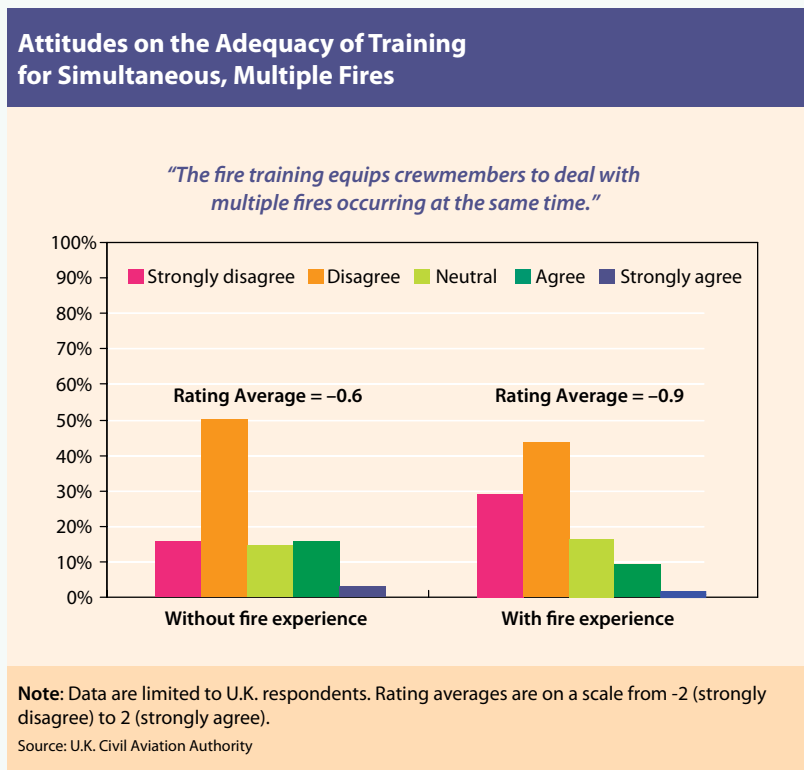


Figure 1

Frequency of Practical Fire Training

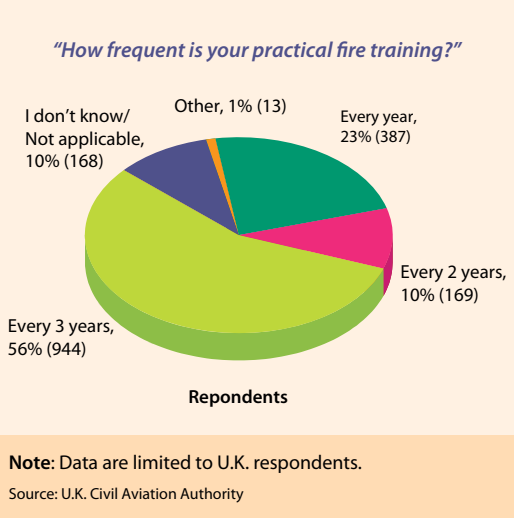


Figure 2

The survey asked respondents how frequent their “practical” fire training had been (Figure 2). The largest proportion, 56 percent, reported they had undergone such training every three years. “Every year” was a more common response than “every two years.”

Respondents were presented with the statement, “The time between practical fire training is such that crewmembers remember everything taught in the training within that period” (Figure 3). Among the inexperienced group, those who received training every year averaged a greater agreement than those who were trained every two or every three years, although in no case did the average rise to an unqualified “agree” score of 1.

For the experienced group responding to the same statement, the averages showed less agreement (Figure 4). The annually trained members of the group had the most favorable opinion of their ability to recall all the practical training.

“Respondents were asked about their perception [of] the realism of fire conditions during their practical training,” the report says. “This was obviously very dependent on their operator/training provider’s training practice and facilities, which might contribute to the polarity of the responses seen in the distributions” (Figure 5).

Attitudes on the Efficacy of Practical Fire Training, Inexperienced Groups

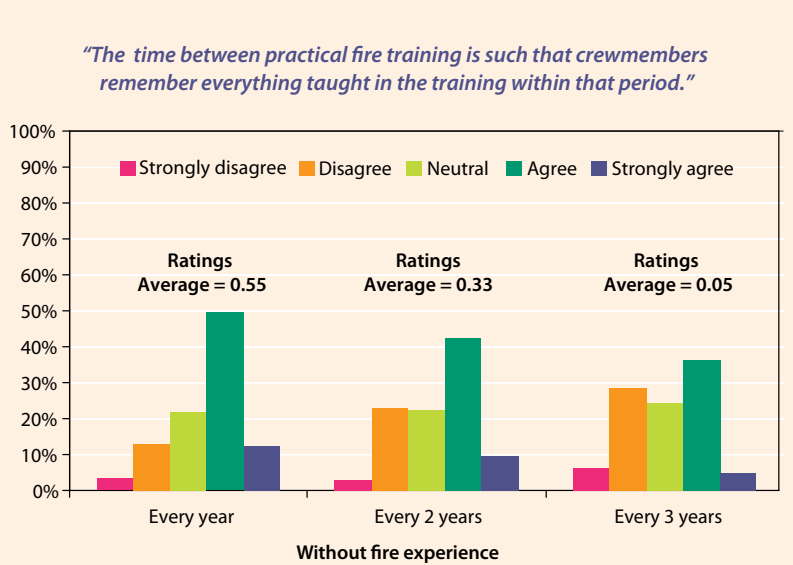


Figure 3

Attitudes on the Efficacy of Practical Fire Training, Experienced Groups

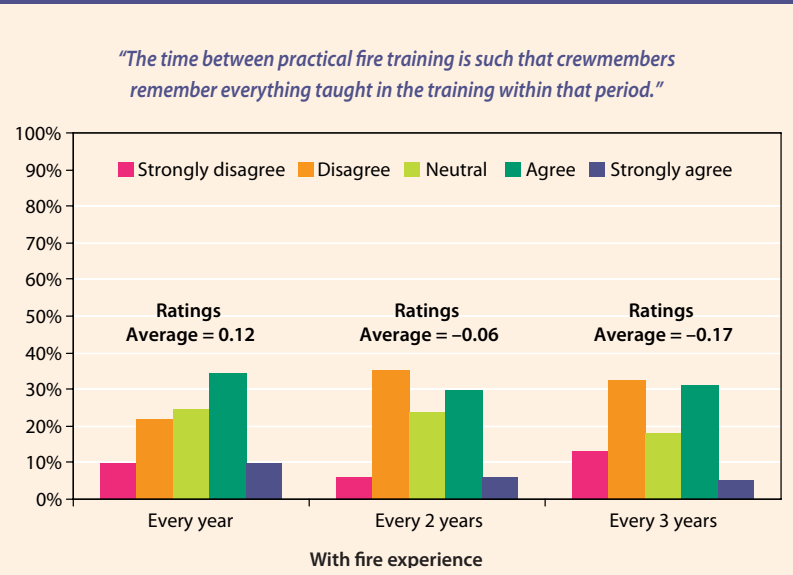


Figure 4