

Politics

I often hear from safety professionals that their efforts are limited by the number of hours in a day, and that mandatory regulatory requirements always take precedence over the critical work of mitigating and assessing risk. It will be that way for a long time. As I have said before, the public and politicians are fascinated with compliance and ignorant of risk (*ASW*, 8/08, p. 1). This is one of the reasons that the Foundation spends so much time trying to keep politics away from real safety issues.

It looks like we have another opportunity to do that. Labor organizations in the U.S. have launched a major political campaign to limit or eliminate the use of foreign maintenance by U.S. airlines (*ASW*, 5/09, p. 5). I would never deny anyone the right to stand together and fight to protect their jobs. As a matter of fact, I helped organize a union once. Unions have a place in the process, and I support that. What can't be supported is the use of safety to justify the argument. We have looked around and asked for data from many members. The fact is that we just can't find a problem; it seems that most of these repair stations are continually audited by regulators and by customers. The amount of scrutiny they receive is amazing.

For that reason, the Foundation recently issued a press release saying, "We have seen no evidence whatsoever that aircraft maintenance performed by non-U.S. repair stations is any less safe than that performed within the U.S., provided the repair stations and personnel are properly certificated and regulated."

The Foundation is not, and never will be, a political organization. Yet it has to deal with threats to aviation safety — and lately the threats

seem to be increasingly political. It is left to the Foundation to state the facts. The U.S. is just one part of a global system. It cannot regulate the world and shouldn't try. Good safety oversight happens when regulators exchange information, watch each other's backs, and hold each other accountable. When a regulator works in isolation, it creates the opportunity for a single point failure. When they work in concert, each one provides a redundant layer of safety. Using regulators to re-inspect repair stations they already know to be safe is not just an annoyance, it is an opportunity lost. The resources that are expended recertifying aircraft, pilots and facilities are diverted from the real work of risk identification and mitigation.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration-European Aviation Safety Agency Bilateral Safety Agreement will allow these regulators to work with each other's data and accept each other's certifications where appropriate. It is the way countries will have to act in the future. It lets people focus on risk instead of bureaucracy.

For all of these reasons, the Foundation is going to have to enter this argument. Not because we care about the politics of the issue — we don't. We just don't want those politics to derail the system of cooperation and mutual recognition that helps make this global industry safe.

It isn't about the politics, it is just about safety.



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