

# Trust

In the past few weeks, I have been reminded of just how badly politics mix with safety. There are two separate storms brewing in the United States that could undermine the key ingredient of our safety programs — trust.

The first storm is the user fee debate, which has been building for years. Airlines and business aviation are battling over the question of who pays for how much of the air traffic control system. I worry that this debate could impact our future safety efforts.

One of the core functions of Flight Safety Foundation has been to spread safety innovations from one segment of the industry to another. But the debate is so intense and the feelings are so bitter that now I am not sure I can get safety people from the airlines and business aviation in the same room.

We can get a sense of what is at risk by looking at some of the safety programs these communities have shared in the past. Our Approach and Landing Accident Reduction (ALAR) program has always reached out to airline and business aviation audiences. Our Ground Accident Prevention (GAP) program has been driven by the airlines, but some of the first products you will find on our Web site address business operations. The Foundation's work in the area of fatigue is supporting long-range operations in Boeing 777s as well as Gulfstream 550s.

While there have always been competing interests, we have been able to put them aside. I hope that the trust and sense of mission that have held us together through the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and spiraling fuel prices are not lost in this debate. Who knows what the next challenges will be — carbon-emission limits, avian flu, personnel shortages? One thing is certain: We are always going to need each other.

The other storm involves air traffic controllers' growing distrust of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). In a recent survey of controllers, less than 10 percent said that they trust FAA management. That is pretty serious if we think about the challenges that the FAA faces. First, it has to deal with ever-increasing demand on a system that is being pressed to its limits. Second, it must start dealing with a large turnover as controllers hired after the 1981 PATCO strike start to retire. Finally, the organization is going to have to create and then transition to a Next Generation Air Transportation System, which must be revolutionary to be successful.

The only way to deal with challenges like these is to lean heavily on tools such as safety management, threat and error management, normal operation safety studies and so on. These tools rely on open and honest reporting and exchange of safety information. In other words, all of these tools rely on trust.

I don't deny anybody the right to lobby for their interests or fight for a fair deal. But I know that we cannot let the festering aviation issues breed the crippling mistrust that could stop safety improvements in their tracks. At the end of the day, regardless of who wins or loses, thousands of people are going to have to reach down deep and find a way to trust again. There is no choice. We live in a system that is built on trust.



A large, white, handwritten signature of William R. Voss, written in a cursive style.

*William R. Voss  
President and CEO  
Flight Safety Foundation*