



### We can't wait for rule changes to counter fatigue

The March ASW ["Easing Fatigue," p. 22] did a great job discussing the challenges and solutions related to flight crew fatigue. Your editorial [p. 5] was "right on" as you characterized the reality of all parties having a lack of will to address a serious safety hazard. You rest responsibility on labor and on the company for accepting the status quo in lieu of the safety and scientific evidence. You are being kind not to include government, who also must influence the situation.

Perhaps, by design, you kept the focus on flight crews and air traffic control. Of course, all aviation workers have similar alertness challenges. From the ramp, to maintenance, to the cabin crews, all workers are fatigued by their work schedules and then by today's challenges of life away from work. A multitude of U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration Aviation Safety Reporting System reports demonstrate the situation with quotes like this one from a maintenance worker: "Fatigue played a role as I had not slept prior to this event for a period approaching 22 hours."

In lieu of immediate rule changes, U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Flight Standards is working with the FAA Civil Aerospace Medical Institute (CAMI) on fatigue-related applied research and development, both for cabin and maintenance workers. The

long-term solution may be appropriate rule making; however, immediate action is necessary.

For the maintenance research, CAMI has formed a working group of scientists, labor representatives and managers to identify and implement short-term solutions. Those could include increasing the use of scientific scheduling; controlled application of fatigue testing and monitoring devices; and distribution of attractive promotional materials that highlight the personal injury, flight safety and financial issues associated with working while fatigued. Most important, all parties must wake up and address the fatigue challenge.

It took a long time for governments and the public to address the issue of alcohol-impaired driving. The issue of fatigue-impaired driving and working must involve that same scientific, regulatory and public recognition and action. Sooner would be better than later.

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### Getting out of sleep debt

Besides the risk management on how we manage our schedules and use science and technique to stay awake, the root cause of fatigue is the individual being unable to get to sleep to reduce the sleep deficit. One aspect that you do

mention is to get a good rest and ease the fatigue and sleep debt. However, how many of us never get to REM sleep [in which dreams occur].

I came to the realization that I was restless at night and missing that "dream period." The catch-22 was a medical condition we call sleep apnea. Once I visited the doctor to have a sleep test and, diagnosed with sleep apnea, I lost my ticket. For me, I knew it was the right thing to do. I realized the risk I was incurring on my own health, family, friends, co-workers and customers.

I made the turnaround in record time and got my special issuance from the FAA. For three years now, I have slept with the "dream machine," worked hard at other factors to reduce my known cause for fatigue and incorporated some of the techniques mentioned to manage my risk during my time of wakefulness.

I'm a fairly young guy and want you to know that if you are not dreaming, keep yawning during the day, have circles under your eyes, have microsleep episodes or your friends tell you "what you look like" — go visit your doctor. The catch-22 of being diagnosed with sleep apnea can be overcome to enjoy a great day. However, the root cause of a fatigue incident or accident is not getting your "dreams," and that is unacceptable in our business.

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