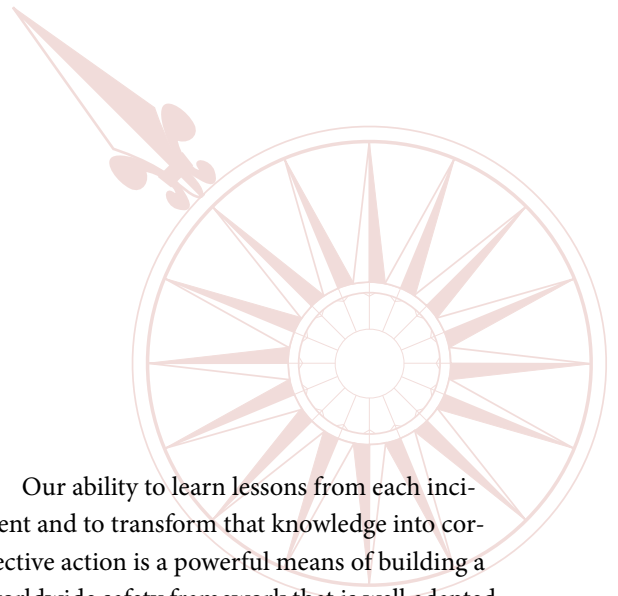


To a Higher Level

BY ROBERT J. AARONSON



Safety is, and will always be, the top priority in the air transport industry. This commonly held commitment to safety has been an essential driver to aviation's constantly improving safety record. Airports Council International (ACI) and the airports community are fully committed to pursuing the highest safety standards in airport operations worldwide.

Working in accordance with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) requirements, ACI has always promoted adequate State oversight of safety, and this should be functionally separate from the operational management of airports. From the inception of the ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Program (USOAP), ACI supported its extension to airports. It is important that this extension of the safety oversight program fosters a harmonized approach by all States to airport safety regulation.

ACI has a long history of fostering safety initiatives: 20 years of monitoring apron safety; establishing and promoting new ACI policies on safety; holding ACI Airport Operational Safety Conferences and Safety Summits; providing training courses on airport safety; producing ACI handbooks on safety; contributing to ICAO safety-related panels and working groups; assisting ICAO on the development of ICAO technical standards for airport design, construction and operation; and reviewing airport safety deficiencies. ACI encourages dialogue between all concerned at the local, national and international levels to improve the overall level of safety when any deficiencies are reported.

But in 2005, a series of fatal aviation accidents delivered a wake-up call to the air transport industry, encouraging all of us to reassess the situation and create new initiatives that would help to raise the safety bar even higher.

Our ability to learn lessons from each incident and to transform that knowledge into corrective action is a powerful means of building a worldwide safety framework that is well adapted for both present and future needs.

With that principle in mind, ACI has redoubled its safety efforts and is pursuing three key areas for increasing airport safety achievements — information sharing, training and documentation.

Information Sharing

Airports have provided great support for increasing information transparency, most recently at the ICAO meeting of the Directors General of Civil Aviation Conference on a global strategy for aviation safety. ACI believes that incident reporting should be non-punitive — immune from sanctions — provided that there is no evidence of wilful negligence or wilful unsafe acts.

To capitalize on the concept of mutual benefit from sharing incident data, ACI has launched a Web site that allows the free flow of information from airport to airport to encourage the development of a global aviation safety culture. Web site content is designed to facilitate airports learning from peer experience.

Initial site features include information on safety management systems; a Web-based “forum” for questions and answers, including discussion of incidents; clear statements of ACI policies; handbooks and specific safety information; and a section where users can upload safety-related documents, images and videos. Data from the ACI Apron Safety Survey is also available, providing an overview of the number and types of incidents and accidents based on ACI member airports' experience. Also posted

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are updates of evolving risk mitigation safety technologies and systems.

The site will grow with increased usage. In the next release we plan to include best practice information submitted by airports with a strong safety culture. The best practices section also will allow the downloading of video clips, images and training content to be used as visual aids in developing programs. Safety experts' contact information will be provided as well.

Safety Management and Audits

ACI encourages airport management to request that all stakeholders operating on the aerodrome develop and implement a safety management system, regularly updated by the stakeholder, and reviewed and audited by the airport operator. ACI members are well aware that they cannot reduce accident rates on their own. An industrywide collaborative approach is needed, for example, on runway incursion prevention.

Safety audits should be carried out regularly to ensure that international, national and local standards and procedures are observed. Audits, in cooperation with local management and personnel, are an effective method of checking the actual level of safety, and detecting flaws or hazards. A regular and systematic audit process is a vital element of a safety management system.

ACI is considering the introduction of an airport safety audit program to assist its members in building this process. Recognizing airport complexities, an audit would be based on the characteristics and configuration of each airport while seeking to apply universal standards of best practice.

ACI Safety Training

Training is essential in ACI's safety enhancement efforts. First step: building a program of safety courses designed by airports, for airports. ACI recently convened a focus group to define airport safety training needs. Safety managers from a diverse range of airports discussed issues such as the structure, content, methodology and frequency of airport safety courses. The clear message from the group is the importance of

practical, relevant and ongoing safety training in making safety the top priority. Consequently, a comprehensive curriculum of airport safety courses, shaped by the focus group's input, is scheduled to begin in October 2006.

Safety Resources

ACI's two new airport safety publications — the *Airside Safety Handbook* and the *Aerodrome Bird Hazard Prevention and Wildlife Management Handbook* — cover aspects of key worldwide airport safety issues, and are succinct guides to current best practices, including checklists for action, risk assessment and mitigation.

The documents, developed by the ACI Operational Safety Subcommittee, follow the guidance and leverage best practices of various airport members, national civil aviation authorities, ICAO and existing ACI policies to produce valuable "hands-on" guides for use both by managers developing safety procedures and by staff conducting daily operations.

ACI encourages all industry partners involved in promoting quality safety practices to visit the Global Safety Network site at <www.aci-safetynetwork.aero>, and to examine our safety publications, available on the ACI website at <www.aci.aero> in the Publications section. These are valuable tools that will help us work together in a well-informed and transparent manner as we continue to better our safety results.

With this series of new and interlinked activities, ACI is addressing its members' needs and contributing to a safer aviation industry for the future. We will continue to work closely with ICAO, governments and our industry partners, the airlines, air navigation service providers, airline pilots and industry suppliers, to ensure the highest standards of professional service. ●

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