

Eurocontrol Provides Alerts

Program offers information with regional and global benefits.

BY TZVETOMIR BLAJEV

Eurocontrol is offering a new safety alert service. The alerts are designed to increase awareness about hazardous situations before an accident or even an incident might bring it to wider attention. Nothing is more useless to the victims of an accident as hearing, in the aftermath, “We knew about that problem, the solutions have been known for ages. How come they didn’t know?”

Eurocontrol’s Safety Alert Service Information was implemented to share information about newly perceived or developing threats and how to avoid or manage the threats. Our vision is a vibrant network that delivers urgent safety information to everyone concerned, originating from any system participant, filtered through Eurocontrol’s review process.

Any aviation professional from any part of the world can trigger the process when in their daily work they come upon a potential safety hazard. Eurocontrol quickly processes these inputs, investigating the relevant standards, validating the issue with experts in different fields and aligning the results with previous experiences. Then it sends the information back to the network as a safety alert.

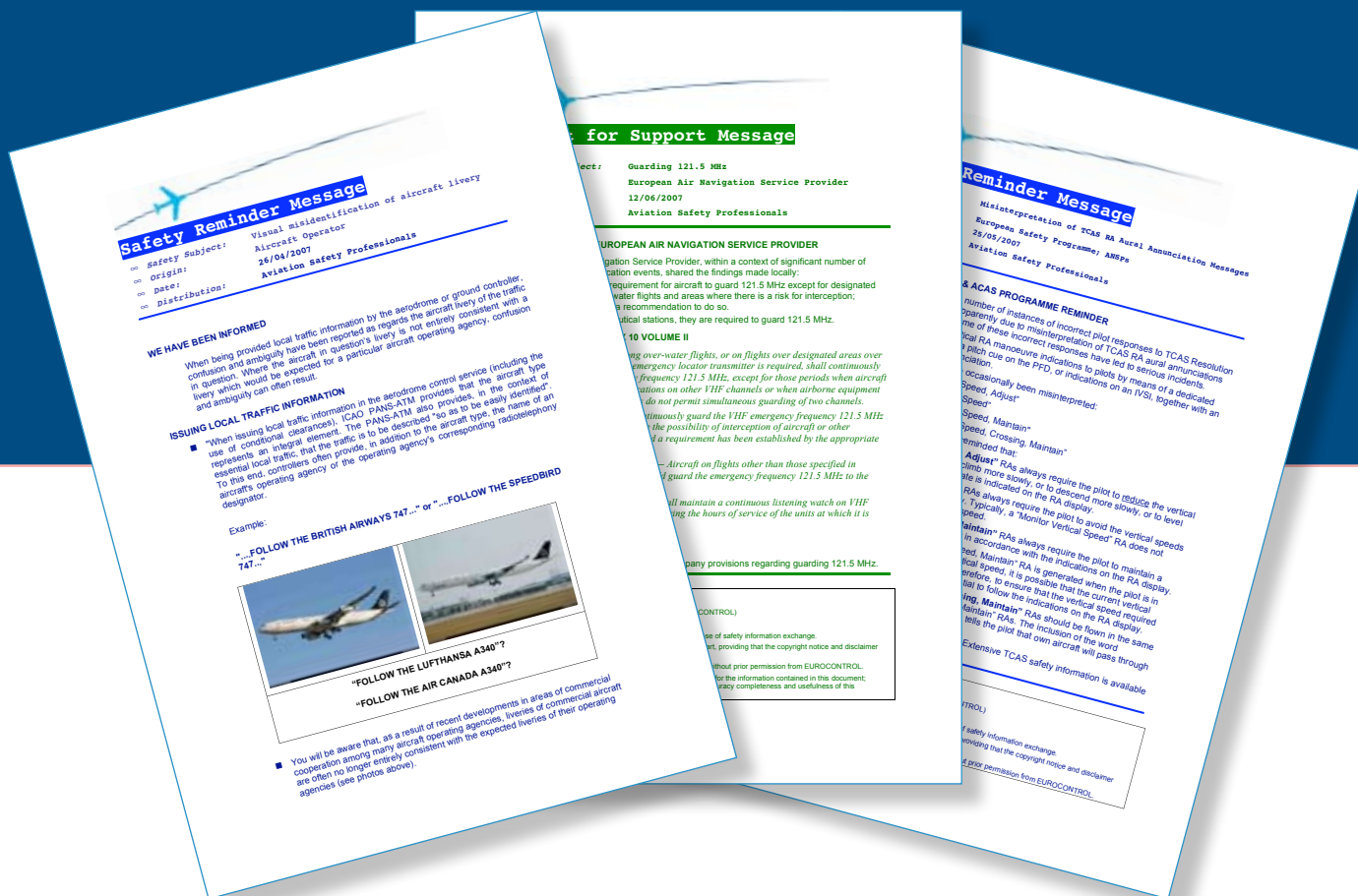
Here’s an example of how this process works: An airline safety officer, reviewing his

confidential reporting system, became concerned about the increasing number of visual misidentifications due to the increasing use of nonstandard airliner markings. In this case, it concerned Star Alliance aircraft.

Star Alliance, a network of 17 airlines, operates some aircraft in the alliance’s livery with few clear markings to identify the specific airline the aircraft belongs to. Here’s what the reporting safety officer wrote:

“One of our flights was about to taxi out and take off from London Heathrow — dense foggy weather at the airport — and the crew was instructed by [air traffic control] to ‘follow an Air Portugal A321 coming from the right.’ The aircraft was painted in a livery of Star Alliance and, according to the crew statement, it took the pilots some three minutes to identify the aircraft and clarify the situation, heavy [radio communications] and dense fog taken into consideration.

“We would like to raise a possible discussion on whether, especially in foggy [meteorological] conditions and during heavy [radio transmissions], some additional information should be issued or provided by the controller in order to lower the risk of confusion or misunderstanding. To offer a possible solution of the problem,



maybe bringing recommendations on the ‘mandatory level’ in terms of putting a remark into the [operational flight plan] in order to give notice that the flight is operated by an aircraft that does not wear a standard operator’s paint would be helpful.”

Eurocontrol examined the issue and relevant reports and alerted service subscribers. In the alert, we reminded air traffic service providers to take particular care when describing aircraft in local traffic information, particularly regarding the use of conditional clearances.

On another occasion, we became aware that there had been instances of incorrect pilot responses to traffic-alert and collision avoidance system (TCAS) resolution advisories (RAs), apparently due to misinterpretation of TCAS RA aural annunciations and RA displays. The alert we issued reminded crews of the correct interpretation of the following RAs: “adjust vertical speed, adjust,” “monitor vertical speed,” “maintain vertical speed,

maintain” and “maintain vertical speed, cross-ing, maintain.”

Sometimes we issue a safety alert containing a request for advice or support, like the alert we issued on June 12 this year concerning procedures for monitoring the 121.5 MHz emergency radio frequency. The alert was based on a request received from a European air traffic service provider, and a large number of responses were received from airlines and air traffic control units showing the differences in local policies and standard operating procedures.

If you would like to join this free network and receive the safety alerts, send an e-mail to <tztvetomir.blajev@Eurocontrol.int>. ●

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