



Editorial



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ECA President

Is the aviation industry becoming complacent?

"Air transport is one of the safest forms of travel. It is essential to improve that level of safety for the benefit of the European citizens."
[EASA Annual Safety Review 2009 – Introduction.](#)

ECA is committed to improving flight safety. Like IFALPA and our Member Associations, our fundamental priority and one of our core activities, is to work with everyone across our industry to achieve the ultimate goal of 'commercial aviation, free from fatal accidents'. Indeed European industry has been quite successful; even if you flew every day aboard a commercial aeroplane registered in one of the 31 EASA member states, it is only after nearly 7000 years that your chance of being involved in a fatal accident rises above 50%. And even then your chance of surviving that accident is still better than 50%. This is one way of describing the current 3-year-average rate of 2 fatal accidents per 10,000,000 flights on scheduled commercial air transport operations.

EASA also declares in its 2009 safety review that "It is essential to improve that level of safety" – although with that aim the EU has not yet been successful. Indeed that 3 year average fatal accident rate for aeroplanes has not improved since 2004 and has even started to edge upwards in the last couple of years. With helicopters the picture is no better. The rate is much higher and despite a halving of the average rate of fatal accidents in the second half of the last 10 years, this only brings us back to the rate which we had achieved at the beginning of the 10 year period!

Given EASA's name (European Aviation Safety Agency), its tagline (Your Safety is our mission) and the EASA website

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Birds & Aviation Safety Don't Get Along

Everybody remembers the US Airways plane floating on the Hudson River on 15 January 2009 after the pilot successfully ditched into the water. The cause was a double engine failure caused by multiple bird strikes. This "happy end" incident reminded us that bird strikes remain a threat to aviation safety. This is why pilots welcome the development of bird detection techniques aimed at improving awareness and knowledge about the presence of birds. However, before they are implemented at the operational level, these techniques must be correctly assessed.

Bird strikes happen every day. Indeed, almost every pilot will be able to tell you a story about them. Most of the occurrences are inconsequential. In less than 10% of the cases, however, they result in damage to the aircraft and, in the worst case scenario, in fatal accidents, which have caused 229 lives to be lost since 1988.



Photo by John Musolino, www.Airliners.net

The most critical phases of flight for bird strikes are take-off and initial climb, which means that the most problematic issue is the presence of birds at or near airports. It is therefore the task of the airport team in charge of runway safety issues (Local Runway Safety Teams) to look for solutions and mitigating measures.

After carrying out a risk assessment, some first-step basic measures can be taken, such as making the airport area as unfriendly as possible to birds, e.g. avoiding water and specific vegetation. Reporting is another key element: pilots need to report all occurrences, to help improve knowledge and awareness of birds near airports.

Nevertheless, in some areas with a high presence of birds, these measures are not enough. This is the reason bird de-

tection techniques are under development for two different applications:

- A strategic use: the aim is to improve knowledge of local and regional bird movements in the airport vicinity. This will help in the development of a bird hazard prevention programme or in improving the airport design and use, etc.
- Real-time tactical use: the use of information derived from bird detection techniques during flight operation itself by wildlife controllers, air traffic controllers and flight crew, e.g. by postponing the take-off or discontinuing the approach in case of a bird alert in the vicinity of the runway.



Photo by Akin Diler, www.Airliners.net

While the first application can be very useful, the second is much more complex and needs to be fully assessed, before it is implemented at the operational level. Beyond the technical aspects, some key questions will have to be answered, such as the role of the pilots and air traffic controllers and the way they have to handle the information received to take the safest decision. After all, it is always the pilots' final responsibility to carry out the flight safely. ■

Accident Investigation – Quo Vadis?

On the 1st of June, the European Parliament's Transport Committee voted on the Accident Investigation Regulation proposed by the Commission at the end of 2009. All through the parliamentary process, ECA was in close contact with many parliamentarians to make the pilots' case. Moreover, voting recommendations were produced and actively promoted ahead of the vote to ensure that our views would receive the largest possible support across the political groups.

home page declaration that they are "The centrepiece of the European Union's strategy for aviation safety", their statistics show that Europe cannot yet claim success. However, we are growing ever more worried that EASA may fail to improve the level of aviation safety in Europe for a number of reasons:

- The vast majority of EASA's rule-making tasks, as reported in their safety review, are technical or equipment related, despite this being a factor in a minority of fatal accidents.
- EASA continues to allow the drift towards weaker, non-binding regulation – so-called "soft law". This will allow a downward spiral of standards as different Member State Authorities permit individual variations to the rules, which could then become usable across the continent

The UK has developed the largest and broadest commercial aviation sector in the EU with scientifically derived, high quality fatigue protection regulations. EASA should not allow the airline associations to block the rest of the EU from benefiting from the same high level of protection. There are signs emerging which indicate that EASA is not insisting that commercial questions are given a lower priority than the protection of the public and passengers from the effects of fatigue in flight crews.

ECA has always been convinced that a single market needs a single regulator to be safe and successful. We are fervent supporters of a strong and independent EASA, which consults across the whole industry before delivering strong, effective safety regulation. ECA welcomes the successes of the past, and will continue to support EASA in its stated aim of improvement in flight safety – but we will also continue to speak out when we see evidence of any other approach being taken. ■

Next Meetings

- 1-2 Sept.:** ECAST Training Task Force, Brussels, BE
- 2 Sept.:** European Flight Recorder Partnership Group, Cologne, DE
- 2 Sept.:** ECA Helicopter FTL subgroup, Brussels, BE
- 2 Sept.:** Eurocontrol Just Culture Task Force, Brussels, BE
- 7-8 Sept.:** ECA Executive Board Meeting, Compiègne, FR
- 14-15 Sept.:** ECA Security Working Group, Brussels, BE

The **European Cockpit Association** is the association of Flight Crew Unions from European States. Based in Brussels, ECA has 38 Member Associations, representing over **38.600** pilots from 38 countries. For more information: www.eurocockpit.be.

The EP's role was good news for aviation safety. On the most crucial points – including the strict independence of the safety investigation from the judicial one and full protection of sensitive data – the Transport Committee followed the ECA's pro-safety stance. This provided the Parliament with a very strong and unambiguous mandate for the negotiations with the Council of Ministers, who had adopted a very legalistic and pro-criminalisation stance, back in March.



context of the Spanair crash, many "trilogue" meetings (involving the Commission, Parliament and Council) took place in June to strike a deal at 1st reading stage. Regrettably, it seems the Council has fiercely resisted to the pro-safety stance of the Parliament and insisted on many substantial changes to the EP's position. Once the results are known in September, it will be time to assess whether aviation safety will be better off with this new Regulation. ■

Under the Spanish EU Presidency which was keen to show results quickly in the

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Pilots Saved the Day!

In-flight turbulence, bird strikes, rejected takeoffs, technical problems, engine failures... Each day, many events like this happen worldwide. And yet, they are not reported in the news. Why? Because the pilots and crew successfully handle the situation and manage to carry passengers safely to their destination.

During the third week of July, more than fifty incidents or minor accidents occurred worldwide, while – thankfully – no fatal accident has been reported (source: the Aviation Herald). In all these cases, thanks to the professionalism and competence of the pilots, the crew and other safety professionals – like air traffic controllers –, all passengers reached their destination.

"Every day, pilots face challenging situations where failure is not an option"

This reminds us of the importance of the pilot's role at a time where the profession is under constant pressure, be it through a possible loosening of European pilot training standards, or from increasing commercial pressures on pilots when having to take crucial safety decisions.

There is often an ideal and yet wrong perception of the role of the pilot. They are seen as being well-paid to go to exotic places in nice uniforms. This is forgetting that, every day, the pilots have the heavy responsibility of ensuring that their passengers and crew arrive at the destination safely. Every day, they face challenging situations where failure is not an option and where alertness, concentration and professional skills are a must. Of course, they are trained to handle these difficult situations. But, in this busy summer period for aviation, let us just remember next time we fly, that the pilot may have saved our day! ■

Course on Human Factors in Aviation Safety SEPLA Office, Madrid, 13-17 Sept. 2010

The Spanish Pilots' Association (SEPLA) is hosting a course on Human Factors in Aviation Safety of the University of Southern California on 13-17 Sept in Madrid.

The objective is to provide human factors knowledge and practical tools that can be readily applied to improve aviation safety.

- Course fee: 700 euro (accommodation & meals not included)
- Deadline for registration: 3 Sept (pre-subscription until 20 August)

http://www.sepla.es/website/seplacms/documentacion/USC_Course_SEPLA.pdf

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