



Editorial



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ECA President

ECA outside Brussels

When we think about ECA, what comes to mind is Europe and therefore Brussels. However,

ECA has also an important role to play outside of Brussels and is a recognised world safety body, as shown by the many invitations to speak that I have received in the past months. At the beginning of October, I was invited to speak to the IATA AVSEC World 2011 (an international conference on aviation security) in Amsterdam, where I raised the issue of new threats, such as cyber threats, laser attacks, Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear threats (CBRN) and insider threats. We – pilots – also defended strongly the need to differentiate flight crews during security screening at airports.

On 12 and 13 October, the first EU-Russia Aviation Summit took place in Saint Petersburg. I had the privilege to chair the session on aviation safety in Russia and the EU. In my opening speech I thanked the organisers for recognising the important role pilots play in and for aviation safety. Indeed, since the dawn of aviation, pilots have worked together with manufacturers, airlines, airports, air navigation service providers as well as ICAO and other regulators to enhance aviation safety. In this respect, pilots are certainly among the most uncompromising advocates for aviation safety.

Current safety standards are very high but improvements have levelled off in recent years, putting Europe down to

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Don't Be Afraid of the Spirits that You Summoned!

After a well-deserved summer break, EASA resumed its meetings of the 'Comment Review Group' which is to advise the Agency on how to deal with the almost 50.000 comments received from stakeholders on its proposed new pilot fatigue rules – the so-called "NPA-2010-14". One of the big questions is whether the Agency will change course and eventually follow scientific evidence when publishing their revised proposal in December this year.

Having been drafted without input from scientific and medical experts, the NPA had instead been tailored around the airlines' commercial interests to avoid adding costs at a time of sluggish economic growth.

However, in view of the 50.000 stakeholder comments, EASA eventually agreed to have 3 independent scientists carry out 3 separate *ex-post* scientific evaluations of the NPA. From February to June 2011 they assessed whether key elements of the proposed rules are in line with the findings of decades of scientific research.

These 3 reports – each of them prepared independently from the others and using different methodologies – were finalised in June. The results – unsurprisingly – show previous research, including EASA's own scientific study prepared in 2008. Showing a high degree of convergence, all 3 reports confirm that the NPA must be revised to bring it in line with "scientific principles and knowledge" as required by the new ICAO Annex 6.

Surprisingly however, EASA decided to keep these 3 reports behind locked doors until the end of the year – rather than making them publicly available to allow stakeholders to assess them and draw their conclusions in view of the upcoming revised EASA proposal. Instead of following the EU's own transparency principles, the Agency rejected several requests to publish the reports, arguing that they are part of the NPA process and can therefore not be released.



It is hence not surprising that people are starting to wonder about the Agency's motives. After ignoring the results from its own scientific study when drafting the NPA, is EASA now keen to reduce the public pressure to actually take the 3 new reports into consideration? Because, once the reports are published together with EASA's revised proposal, they will be 'buried' in a package of hundreds of pages. With only 2 months left to comment on this package few will have the time to read what the 3 scientists had to say and whether EASA followed their recommendations.

EASA has the opportunity to significantly improve its NPA proposal and the 3 scientists' reports provide a useful basis for doing so. Hiding the reports raises questions and it sends the wrong signal. Be open, be transparent and focus on providing Europe's passengers with safe flight rules! ■

More information: www.dead-tired.eu

the third safest region in the world. If we want to embrace the future expected growth in air traffic, we must raise aviation safety further. If we fail to do this, the number of accidents and incidents will grow in the same proportion – something our industry cannot afford. Safety may be expensive, but accidents cost much more.

This also means, we cannot let commercial or other considerations lower the current safety levels – even if we suffer one of the biggest financial crises in decades and even if competition from outside Europe is growing. Rather than allowing our standards to go down, European decision-makers must strive to raise safety levels globally. The first step to achieve this is to show a good example, join forces with other safety leaders and work through ICAO to achieve highest safety standards across the globe. This would also help to prevent third-country operators from competing with poor safety standards rather than with the best service and commercial offer.

ECA – and our safety experts – can contribute to this and have done so for many years. ‘Piloting Safety’ is our motto and is part of our daily work – be it in the cockpit, Brussels or any other region. ■

Next Meetings

8-9 Nov.: ECA Executive Board, Brussels, BE

9-10 Nov.: EASA OPS.055 Group, Cologne, DE

9 Nov.: IFALPA Pilot Training Standard Meeting, Frankfurt, DE

16-17 Nov.: SAGAS Meeting, Brussels, BE

17 Nov.: European Aviation Safety Advisory Committee, Cologne, DE

23-24 Nov.: ECA General Assembly, Brussels, BE

25 Nov.: EUROCONTROL Runway Excursions Working Group, Brussels

28 Nov.: ECA Training, Licensing & Operations WG, 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.

Bird Strike – a Danger, also for Helicopters

The January 2009 Hudson River miracle, where “Captain Sully” safely landed after his A320 was hit by a flock of birds, revealed to the public the hazard that birds represent for airplanes. Bird strikes in helicopters are less famous as they are not always reported and given so much media coverage. Yet the danger exists and, once more, the solution is to be sought in stringent certification requirements.

If a collision with our feathered colleagues can lead to serious problems for airplanes, then what about the helicopter plastic windshields? And more importantly, what can be done to improve safety?



Helicopter windshield hit by a bird

This issue has concerned me since the beginning of my aviation career, when I read the accident report of a Cessna hit by a small bird that penetrated the windshield. Normally the windshield should have resisted the impact of this bird. However, wrong maintenance with unapproved cleaning agents had modified the physical characteristics of the plastic, and the windshield had therefore lost its stability and flexibility.

To understand why birds continue to damage helicopters, we therefore looked at the requirements. Surprisingly enough, there is no requirement at all for small helicopters (Certification Specifications 27), whilst larger helicopters (Certification Specifications 29) must be capable of continuing safe flight and landing following impact with a single 1 kg bird. Not mentioning that some manufacturers try to deviate from these already low requirements to avoid weight penalty and are approved to do so by the authorities.

As these requirements seemed quite low, we directly asked the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) for explanations. The first reason given was that “historically, due to the relatively low speed of helicopters, their visibility and noise signature, birds were able to avoid collisions and bird strikes incidents were therefore low and not identified as an immediate safety concern.” This is no longer true. Helicopters fly faster and are less noisy. This, combined with more night operations, makes the probability of helicopter bird strikes higher.

Furthermore, EASA explained that these requirements are based on a [study](#) carried out by the Agency in 2008, which concluded that requirements for CS 29 aircraft were sufficient. The most interesting is the recommendation about small rotorcraft: it is recognised that requirements are necessary, but, given the high cost that this modification would mean and that “a change in the regulations may take some time to be effective, the use of helmets and visors might therefore represent a more practical and timely option.”

Fortunately, this “solution” is not the Agency’s final word, who confirmed that new rules for CS 27 helicopters will be drafted, but the start date has not been set yet. Although the ECA Helicopter Working Group welcomed this initiative, it can only encourage the Agency to launch it as soon as possible and advised that requirements should be based on speed rather than weight given that heavy helicopters do not mean faster ones. ■

By Thomas Rueder, helicopter pilot at the German HEMS company ADAC.

Cockpit News, November 2011
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