

This is your captain sleeping: How exhausted pilots snooze at the controls (and two of them even had a nap at the same time)

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Last updated at 11:52 AM on 7th April 2011

Pilots are falling asleep in the cockpits of UK passenger jets, a report suggests.

Nearly half of easyJet pilots surveyed said they were suffering from significant fatigue and a fifth reported that their abilities were compromised in flight more than once a week.

Alarmingly, two pilots on the same British-registered plane admitted falling asleep at the same time – risking a mid-air collision.



Falling asleep on the job: The study showed one in five pilots felt fatigued, though the union says the problem is 'systemic' across the aviation industry

The study, published today, was commissioned by the British pilots' union, Balpa, and carried out by University College London.

One pilot, who works for a large UK airline but did not want to be named, said that about three months ago, both he and his co-pilot had very little sleep during their rest period.

On the subsequent flight, his co-pilot asked if he could take a nap, which the pilot approved. But then the pilot fell also asleep for about ten minutes.

The study of 492 pilots showing one in five felt fatigued at least once a week was carried out among easyJet pilots, though the union says the problem is 'systemic' across the aviation industry.



Damning: easyJet pilots were quizzed in the study, which was commissioned by the British pilots' union, Balpa

The example in which two pilots fell asleep together in the cockpit involved another airline.

Speaking to the BBC, the pilot said his co-pilot had legitimately requested a 'power nap'.

Neither had slept during their rest period because of shift patterns. The pilot said: 'About 10 or 15 minutes into that "power nap" I got to the point where I could not keep my eyes open any more. I convinced myself it would be fine if I just shut my eyes for a couple of seconds.

'I woke up with a start maybe five or ten minutes later. And the aircraft had been flying itself for that time.

'The first thing you do obviously is to check your height and your speeds and all of your instrumentation, and hopefully everything has performed normally while you've been asleep – while both of you have been asleep.'

He said: 'When I woke up, it was a big adrenaline rush.

'The worst scenario is that the autopilot would disconnect itself and then the aircraft would lose or gain height and that would be extremely dangerous as you'd go into the path of oncoming aircraft.

'Now there are warning systems that tell you you are deviating from the correct altitude but they are not excessively loud – it would be easy enough to sleep through that, and I probably don't need to tell you what the consequences of that are.'

Balpa is worried the situation will get worse under European proposals that would see the maximum flying time for UK pilots going up from 900 hours in a 12-month period to 1,000.

But European authorities claim the proposed changes will not lead to a reduction in safety.

EasyJet said last night that it did not recognise the union's findings and insisted it complied fully with all safety regulations.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1374242/This-captain-sleeping-How-exhausted-pilots-snooze-controls-nap-time.html#ixzz1Jsn4ULrq>