

The Union: "Not uncommon that pilots fall asleep"

http://www.svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/facket-inte-ovanligt-att-piloter-somnar_5913895.svd

The SAS-Pilot that fell asleep during a flight between Copenhagen and Stockholm had flown four routes (legs) in one day. According to The Swedish Pilot Union it is common that pilots fall asleep during duty.

-“This does not happen every week, it happens every day”, says Bo Säbb, Chairman of the union’s Flight safety committee.

Three hours of sleep and five planned flights during the same day was, according to the SAS-Pilot, the reason that he fell asleep during a flight between Copenhagen and Stockholm.

When the Co-Pilot came back from a visit to the toilet, he had to call the flight deck twice before the Captain woke up and opened the cockpit door, writes Aftonbladet and refers to a report that the Norwegian newspaper Verdens Gang has received access to.

SAS has commented the occurrence and says that the company will not continue with any further action directed towards the pilot.

The Swedish Pilot Union thinks that the event is regrettable, but at the same time, points out that five flights during one day, which was planned for the pilot, is not unusual.

-“It can be more than that..! Six flights is also not uncommon. We can only agree with that it is an extreme workload”, says the Chairman of SPF – Gunnar Mandahl.

In the report itself, the pilot describes how he got – “extremely tired” and had to “fight to keep his eyes open..”

Bo Säbb, chairman of SPF’s Flight Safety Committee, says that the amount of flights/day is a deciding factor for flight safety.

-“Take offs and landings are the demanding parts of a flight.. The more flights – the faster you will get tired. That’s how it is..”, he says.

“Pilots that fall asleep during flight is not a rare phenomenon unfortunately, he says. Very few pilots report their “nap” though...

“ There are many cases, like this one, that are never reported to the authorities. We know of several cases where pilots have not answered radio calls for several hours. Cases that have been dismissed with strange explanations. People in the business know what it’s all about...”

That the SAS-Pilot had the courage to report what had happened is something positive. This fact needs to be expressed, says both Bo Säbb and Gunnar Mandahl.

“The reports represent a culture that has served aviation well over the years. It is the only way to conduct a long term work in the interest of flight safety. If the person that sends in the report is punished, then we face the obvious risk that pilots no longer want to report about incidents in which they were involved themselves”, says Gunnar Mandahl.

According to Bo Säbb, there are several “in depth studies” that shows how the amount of flights affects flight safety. The problem is that the authorities don’t use them..

“Our flight time limitations and rules governing duty time is the biggest threat to flight safety! The recommended maximum duty time for anyone working irregular shifts is normally 38 hours/week, but in this area the European Union has made an exception for pilots and cabin personnel and increased the limit to 60 hours/week..”, he says.

Within the European union right now there is an ongoing process of changing the rules governing flight and duty time limitations. After studies of the proposal that EU has published, Bo Säbb fears that the new rules will be even worse than the ones that are in effect.

“Then I don’t know if I want to continue to fly any more..! We want rules that are equal for every pilot within the European union, but only on a level that everyone can accept.. Surely there will be protests, but the real problem is that the employers and their associations have such a strong “lobbying power” in Brussels”, he says.

Bo säbb also says that there is a risk that airlines that support strong science based flight and duty time regulation will have to compete against smaller companies that will use the regulation to their advantage and fly – “out in the corners of the regulation..”

“This is a problem that is currently “swept under the carpet” and treated like a “hot potato” that no one wants to touch. Unfortunately it might take some incidents and a few crashes before someone steps on the brake and says – “Enough is enough..! “, he says.

On SAS the nominated postholder, Björn Granviken, says that he does not agree with that it is common that pilots fall asleep.

“No, I don’t want to say that this occurs regularly. It’s good though that we receive this kind of information and that we have an open and transparent culture when it comes to reports like this. That way we build up the knowledge necessary to prevent this type of “unwanted event” in the future”, he says.

Björn Granviken also points out that SAS has added more limitations on flight and duty time compared with EU’s recommendations. The maximum duty time for SAS-pilots is 47.5 hours/week.