

The Politics of Global Aviation

How a U.N. bureaucracy—ICAO—affects you.

"I hear they might change the Age 60 rule," one pilot says to another.

"Who decides that?"

"ICAO."

"What's an ICAO?"

"I have no idea."

ICAO, the International Civil Aviation Organization, is a United Nations agency that develops the principles and procedures of international air navigation and fosters the planning and development of international air transport. On Dec. 7, 1944, representatives from 52 nations met at the Stevens Hotel in Chicago, Ill., and signed the Convention on International Civil Aviation. That agreement, commonly known as the "Chicago Convention," established ICAO.

It sounded good, but when ICAO was first established, it made decisions about aviation and developed standards without pilot representation. In fact, no organization representing airline pilots had been invited to the convention, despite the fact that it was held in ALPA's "hometown." ALPA was less than enthusiastic about ICAO, doubtful that a bunch of diplomats in suits would be able to do much about the difficulties with which its member airline pilots had to contend.

Air Line Pilot, December 1944, ran a photo of the convention, reporting: "Apparently, it was a gaudy show with much talk and little agreement and, it is strongly suspected, little accomplishment. It proved, once again, that there is yet no magic international wand that can be waved to cause many different peoples of the world to skip lightly through worldly problems which involve the division of goods, rights, or benefits. It's all too beautiful, and whether we like it or not, power politics will more than likely provide the answers. At any rate, everyone was rep-



AIRLINE PILOT ARCHIVES

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resented at the International Civil Aviation Conference except the working people—can it be they weren't good enough? Anyway, nothing very much ever comes of these sorts of affairs."

But rapid globalization of the airline industry, and the eventual trend toward harmonization, soon made it imperative that ALPA and other airline pilot unions insert themselves in the ICAO standards development process. This situation gave birth to the International Federation of Air Line Pilots Associations (IFALPA), whose purpose was to create and maintain safety in the skies for both passengers and pilots. IFALPA eventually became credentialed as a representative to ICAO and gave airline pilots a voice at ICAO proceedings.

Today, more than 180 contracting member states participate in ICAO stan-

dards development. And through affiliation with IFALPA, ALPA and other airline pilot unions from around the world are now fully engaged in the politics of ICAO. IFALPA even maintains offices on the top floor of the 16-story ICAO headquarters in Montreal.

"I am absolutely and utterly convinced that the airline pilot community around the world has to be engaged in this process," says Capt. Paul McCarthy (Delta, Ret.), who serves as IFALPA's permanent representative to ICAO. "That takes money and people. Right now, we have both, and so I think we're doing a fairly good job."

"Today, we operate from a different set of values than I did when I got into the airline business in the 1970s," says McCarthy. "Until as late as the 1990s, the FAA was almost the only organization in the world that was truly ef-

fective at publishing a coherent set of aviation regulations. It set the de facto standards for much of the world. Today, there are many more competent regulatory agencies, but they might not all come up with the same conclusions. And so the place where everything gets settled is ICAO."

McCarthy's workload encompasses a host of issues—flight time/duty time, fatigue risk management systems, A380 wake turbulence, runway incursions,

and airspace problems in developing countries, to name just a few.

After the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, security work became a high priority for representatives to ICAO. Indeed, they fast-tracked the security agenda so that security work that normally would have taken at least 3 years to complete was done in 1 year.

"Everything that ICAO does affects airline pilots around the world," says Capt. Nico Voorbach (KLM), vice-chair-

man of IFALPA's Security Committee and an observer to ICAO's Aviation Security Panel. "A lot of countries will adopt an ICAO standard as a starting point and then strengthen it to fit their own requirements. For that reason, it's extremely important that airline pilots—no matter where they live—pay attention to what goes on within ICAO and work together to create policies that maintain a high level of safety and security." —Gavin Francis, Staff Writer

80 Percent of UK Pilots Surveyed Admit Flying Fatigued

Apparently pilot fatigue is a problem not just on this side of the pond—80 percent of airline pilots flying within the United Kingdom and other European countries admit to suffering tiredness that impairs their judgment, according to a new study by the University of Central England.

Short-haul pilots claim they are routinely asked to fly extra hours—which should be reserved for dealing with delays and emergencies—to meet packed airline schedules.

In the skies above the UK, an average of one near miss per month is now blamed on pilot fatigue, and concern is growing that mounting pressure on tired flight crews could lead to tragedy.

The researchers spoke to one pilot who admitted he was too tired to drive home after completing eight flight legs in a single day, so he pulled over to the side of the road and fell asleep for hours.

Researchers posted a fatigue questionnaire on an airline pilot website closed to the general public. More than 160 short-haul pilots responded to the survey, details of which have been published in *Occupational Medicine*.

More than 75 percent of the pilots reported experiencing "severe fatigue," while 81 percent complained that their

tiredness was worse now than 2 years ago. Most disturbing of all, 80 percent reported flying while their judgment was impaired by fatigue.

The UK's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) says that flightcrew members flying more than seven flights per day cannot exceed a 9-hour duty day. But there's a loophole: Pilots are allowed to use up to 3 extra "discretion" hours to cope with exceptional delays in the air or on the ground.

Dr. Craig Jackson, a health psychologist involved in the study, claims short-haul airlines, particularly budget airlines, routinely use this extra time as part of their daily roster in a bid to cram in more flights on a route. Jackson said 21 percent of pilots reported regularly flying into their "discretion" periods.

According to official figures from the CAA, every month UK-registered airlines experience more than one aviation safety incident involving flight crew fatigue. Since 2004, 45 such incidents have been reported.

ALPA's UK counterpart, the British Air Line Pilots Association, has expressed grave concerns about the level of fatigue now being suffered by its members.

One budget airline, EasyJet, had conducted its own research into fatigue and had taken steps to combat it, including changing roster patterns and introducing a fatigue risk management system.

British Airways claims that it is the only UK airline to allow pilots to choose their own flight rosters in a way similar to that of pilots in New Zealand. Other fatigue-mitigation strategies that BA uses include augmented crews, flight crew bunks, and crewmembers being allowed to declare themselves as unfit to fly because of fatigue.

A retired pilot interviewed by the Scottish newspaper *The Scotsman* said, "Flying for six or seven hours a day, making several landings and takeoffs, requires a huge amount of concentration. The fatigue can be cumulative, and it can be difficult to catch up with sleep if you are flying early or late flights."

He added: "I don't think I realized quite how bad it was until I retired and started sleeping properly—it took me months to catch up on sleep." ☺

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