



PRESS RELEASE

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Pilot Fatigue – America Acts, Europe Paralysed

Prompted by the Colgan Air crash, which killed 50 people last February in the USA, yesterday the US Aviation Authorities kick-started a special Rulemaking Committee to modernise US pilot fatigue rules. The Committee, which includes all relevant aviation stakeholders, will have until 1 Sept. to make recommendations on how to change fatigue rules in order to improve flight safety. This is in stark contrast to the European Union. EU Institutions so far shied away from acting upon the conclusions from its own scientific study that shows that current EU pilot fatigue rules are insufficient and should be improved.

"Does Europe need a fatal accident too, before actions are taken over here?" asks Philip von Schöppenthau, Secretary General of ECA. "Here in the EU, pilot fatigue is the single biggest 'hot potato' safety issue where neither the European Commission nor the European Aviation Safety Agency has shown any leadership to move decisively towards science-based EU rules. EASA had been required to undertake a scientific evaluation of EU pilot fatigue rules, and the report has been available since last Autumn. But confronted with massive opposition from the airline industry, it seems the Institutions don't want to get their fingers burnt."

In late Sept. 2008, a group of renowned scientists came to the conclusion that today's EU Flight crew fatigue protection rules are insufficient to adequately protect against the flight safety risks posed by pilot fatigue. For example, their study found that the currently allowed maximum daily flight duty period of 13-14 hours "exceeds reasonable limits" and is "not in keeping with the body of scientific evidence"; it should therefore be reduced. Similarly, the currently allowed maximum of 11:45 hours night duty should be reduced to 10 hours, because of the particularly fatiguing nature of work at night.

"The airlines claim that the scientific study's recommendations would cost them money" explains Capt. Martin Chalk, ECA President, "and it therefore comes as no surprise that they try to discredit the study as 'flawed science'." He adds: "Interestingly, just a few days ago, Air France CEO Gourgeon is quoted as having said that 'there is never any arbitration between' profitability and safety. But what is really worrying is that the EU legislator lets 9 months pass without working on new rules. Do European passengers not merit the same protection as US citizens? It is high time for Europe to start thinking 'safety' instead of 'politics' or 'economics'."

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Founded in 1991, ECA is the association of flight crew unions, representing more than 38,200 pilots from 36 European countries.

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ECA's special web-section on Pilot Fatigue: <http://www.eurocockpit.be/index.php/ftl-section>