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Regulatory Abuse by Airlines Threatens Aviation Safety

The largest single cause accelerating the downward trend of aviation safety is the increase in the number of regulatory breaches by airlines remaining uncorrected. This startling fact is difficult to comprehend particularly as recent aircraft accident reports have cited weak regulatory oversight being a major contributory factor.

With recent safety related events in the United States leading to an admission by the FAA (Federal Aviation Authority) that its oversight of airlines had not been to the required standard, AEI must, due to similar European incidents, pose the question of whether EASA, the European Agency tasked with implementing the highest common standards is actually "Fit For Purpose".

This is just one of the serious issues on the agenda when Engineers from all over the world meet in Varna, Bulgaria, from the 23rd until the 26th September for Aircraft Engineers International's 37th Annual Congress.

Investigations carried out by several AEI affiliates has revealed that airlines are deliberately abusing or even ignoring aviation regulations in order to reduce costs. Recently AEI raised the issue of pilots not reporting aircraft defects as they occurred but rather when convenient for the airline. These concerns were confirmed by both EASA (European Aviation Safety Agency) and SAFA (Safety Assessment of Foreign Aircraft programme), yet even despite this, affiliates continue to observe malpractice. This arrogant behaviour highlights both a total disregard for passenger safety and a belief by the operator that such dangerous behaviour generally carries no risk of any consequence.

AEI's Secretary General commented that "it is an extremely worrying time. With everybody currently suffering the effects of a global financial meltdown, investment in maintenance and safety has also been targeted for savings and this is completely unacceptable". AEI are also concerned about the rapid increase in the widespread abuse of the Aircraft Minimum Equipment List. This list contains information on which aircraft systems may be unserviceable for flight and which ones may not. It is becoming evident that in order to save money airlines are cutting corners and taking risks by allowing continued commercial operation of aircraft with improperly diagnosed faults. AEI are convinced that such behaviour was a casual factor in both the recent Spanair and Turkish Airlines accidents.

AEI further believes that national aviation regulators must start to act instead of maintaining their current stand-off attitude. This would require an immediate halt to the current regulatory trend of appeasing operator's demands for lighter regulation. National airworthiness authorities if genuine about safety being paramount must move away from paper auditing and become more hands on".

AEI's annual congress will be taking a closer look at these and other issues in order to find ways of ensuring this negligence will not go unpunished. AEI's intention at congress is to increase awareness of this downward trend in passenger safety then pressurize national airworthiness authorities and EASA into acting quickly where airlines are clearly failing to meet their basic safety targets.

A press conference will be held at 11:00 on the 26th September in the Golden Tulip Hotel in Varna.

For more information Contact AEI pr@airengineers.org or sg@airengineers.org or Tel +31 655 930 175 or check out the website www.airengineers.org