

Aircraft Engineers Criticise Aviation Safety Regulators Lack of Independence

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AEI, the international body representing aircraft engineers is becoming increasingly concerned about the approach being taken by the world's leading aviation regulators towards safety. Recent events in the United States and ongoing events in Australia and Europe have highlighted that regulators are becoming far too close to those they regulate and as a consequence are losing their objectivity.

Unfortunately more new evidence of safety lapses will be presented to delegates during the 38th AEI Annual Conference to be held in Hamburg, Germany from 22nd - 25th September 2010.

Fred Bruggeman, AEI's Secretary General said that "events in Australia involving CASA, the Australian National Authority approving foreign maintenance bases to perform safety related maintenance on commercial aircraft despite clear and overwhelming evidence of poor standards are about to reverberate here in Europe". Engineers at Australian airline Qantas have highlighted significant safety violations and low standards of workmanship on Qantas aircraft being maintained by maintenance facilities outside Australia. A request by the Australian Licensed Aircraft Engineers union, ALAEA, to access the CASA audit inspection reports on the foreign maintenance facilities led to a three year legal battle as CASA refused to release the documents. Fortunately ALAEA won the battle and so prevented CASA from wasting more public money in their quest to hide the truth from the public. "It is clearly maintenance to a price and not a standard" added Fred Bruggeman "yet it gets worse. The maintenance facilities involved are based in Singapore and Hong Kong but have also been approved to maintain European registered aircraft by EASA, the European regulator".

AEI has been warning for some time now that EASA is not only failing in its main obligation, to protect the flying public but also unfortunately failing to standardize European Aviation regulation. In fact EASA is only fulfilling the prophecy that they would turn out to be nothing more than a paper tiger.

To date EASA has been unable or unwilling to tackle wayward European National Authorities and remains completely ineffective when confronted with stubborn national politics. In fact EASA has now resorted to offering both regulators and industry ways to wriggle out of their safety responsibilities by proposing to introduce "alternative" acceptable means of compliance. This is nothing more than offering airlines the opportunity to "self regulate". An apt analogy could be governments being permitted to outsource policing responsibilities to criminals.

This and many other safety issues will be discussed during congress where the intention is to set out a road map for action involving all of AEI's 40+ affiliates worldwide. Self regulation has yet to succeed in any industry to which it has been applied with the recent banking disaster being the latest example in a long line of costly and tragic examples. Government regulatory bodies are set up to protect the public by ensuring standards remain above a minimum level. In aviation this has to a certain extent been achieved. In the past regulators did just that; regulated, and the outcome is a significant improvement in safety levels. Accidents are now rare as a result.

The challenge facing delegates at this year's congress is how to reverse the current race to the bottom which is being commercially driven by industry yet remains unopposed by regulators. If we are not careful all safety gains made over the past 20 years will be undone as lowest common standards take a hold. The inevitable outcome will be an increase in accidents.