



AEI Press Release

European Aviation Authorities Refuse to Protect Whistle-blower's

Hamburg, Germany 29 Sept 2010.

Experience has shown that often before an aircraft accident occurs, a number of incidents and numerous other deficiencies have highlighted the existence of safety hazards. It is therefore in both the public and the aviation industry's best interests to gather better knowledge of these occurrences in order to facilitate analysis and trend monitoring with the aim of preventing the accident before it occurs. AEI and over 40 of its affiliates around the world are particularly concerned about the severe consequences suffered by those who report safety violations.

During AEI's 38th Annual Congress in Hamburg, one of Europe's leading regulators refused to offer unequivocal support for those who do brave the consequences and report. The president of one of Europe's largest national authorities stated that the only thing authorities are prepared to do is remove the name of the reporter from the report. AEI highlighted the fact that within aviation maintenance, engineers are required to sign with name and personal number for any activity they perform. Therefore it is extremely easy for any airline or maintenance organisation to uncover the reporter. In addition several other national authorities in Europe are known to be very careless when they handle confidentially reported information. Several colleagues have lost their job as a result of this carelessness. Unfortunately this attitude is widespread despite the European Commission introducing several directives designed to promote the collection of safety related data whilst protecting the reporter. AEI therefore urges all European regulators to revisit these directives and remind themselves of their responsibilities.

EC Directives 216/2008 and 2003/42 not only require the protecting of the reporter but actually make the reporting of unsafe activities mandatory as it is clearly in the public interest to protect them from such activities. Therefore both lawmakers and regulators must work together to ensure the aviation community is free to highlight malpractice without having to fear personal consequences. When asked what kind of protection reporters can expect from national aviation authorities in Europe should they find themselves being punished or even fired as a consequence of reporting unsafe incidents, the silence was deafening. None of the European regulators reacted positively to this question with some even happy to state that you are on your own.

However to ensure that safety remains paramount AEI will set out a roadmap of actions on how to safeguard aircraft maintenance in the future by prioritising the main areas of risk, highlighting weak regulations and those ignored by both airlines and regulators. AEI also calls upon regulators to place more distance between themselves and the financial aspects of keeping an airline viable. Regulators are put in place to regulate safety on the public's behalf and as such must ensure safety remains paramount. Commercially viable but unsafe airlines are not an acceptable option.

Therefore pressure on our members to "shut up and be quiet" will no longer be tolerated. AEI wishes to work in partnership with both regulators and industry to maintain the highest levels of safety. Shooting of any messenger is short sighted, not in the public interest and therefore doesn't have a place in the 21st century. The European Transport Directorate may wish to seek improvements in the protection of reporters within some of the current regulations but must also take its responsibility seriously by enforcing regulations in those countries that are unwilling or unable to implement change.

In addition AEI in accordance with current European freedom of information regulations recently requested documents from the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) relating to the audit and approval of foreign maintenance organisations. During Congress shocking [video](#) evidence of safety violations at these EASA approved facilities was presented.



The low cost maintenance organisations concerned remain fully operational despite clear evidence of gross negligence and poor maintenance standards. EASA has failed to respond to the freedom of information requests within the prescribed 15 working days. Therefore not only are these maintenance facilities still active but they continue to maintain European registered aircraft as well. The lack of action from all involved regulatory authorities means that the alleged safety violations may still be on-going which could potentially endanger lives. AEI considers this behaviour unacceptable and urges both urgent intervention and the releasing of the requested documents.

Unfortunately this is not the first time EASA have refused to release documents which may potentially highlight a lack of will to directly confront safety violations.

The EASA mission statement is and I quote “to promote the highest common standards of safety and environmental protection in civil aviation in Europe and worldwide”.

Delegates attending congress made it clear to AEI that they consider its time to deliver.