

MEDIA STATEMENT

19 October 2011

Regulations alone will not reduce aviation accident rate

Speaker after speaker at the 5th National Aviation Safety Seminar pointed out that regulations alone will not bring down the rate of aviation accidents. Hosted by the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA), and held in Boksburg, the event was attended by, among others, safety representatives from airlines, airports, aviation training organisations, general aviation, aircraft maintenance organisations as well as recreational aviation.

Speaking on behalf of government, Mr. George Mahlalela, Transport Department's Director-General, told delegates that aviation plays an important role in modern life. "This industry is at the heart of global trade and economic growth. Yesterday when we opened the 3D Simulator at the ATNS Training Academy; Transport Minister Sibusiso Ndebele highlighted that the aviation industry's existence might be threatened if the skills that are needed in this sector are not identified and developed in time. This is critical so that the relevant training is located within the framework of the demanding and technically advanced areas."

Mahlalela added that "last year alone, 21 million people and 240 000 tonnes of freight travelled to, from and within South Africa. Aviation is a critical strategic component of the South African economy and indeed the economies of all states in Southern Africa. Positive policies and strategies are needed to drive aviation's significant economic benefits."

The Acting Director of Civil Aviation, Mr. Zakhele Thwala urged delegates to "discuss key issues and to come up with practical solutions that can be implemented within a very short period of time but that can get bigger results". He further urged the aviation community to learn from the mistakes of others.

On the other hand the CAA's General Manager of Aircraft Safety, Mr. Obert Chakarisa, said that statistics of aircraft accidents and incidents are good indicators of the status of our aviation safety record. "Any attempts to improve the aviation safety records need to take into account the outlook shown through statistics and use such information to point out areas that require concerted effort and focus. Statistics that are mined and then allowed to gather dust on the shelves are not good enough, until they can influence the attainment of the ultimate goal, which is to half the aircraft accident rate by 2014," Chakarisa told delegates.

Another aviation veteran, Robin Spencer-Scarr, argued that if pilots abide by the existing applicable rules, aviation accidents could be reduced. He urged pilots to "do everything by the book and that includes basic procedures such as doing proper pre-flight inspections, ensuring there is enough fuel on board, briefing passengers, flying the aircraft within its and the pilot's ability, as well as checking weather reports and not taking chances".

Spencer-Scarr further pointed out that at times pilots make the wrong decisions, adding that knowledge, skill and attitude are at the core of the decision making process. "The one that will influence the pilot's decision-making process the most is attitude. What we see most is that the pilot's attitude will be made up of ego, confidence, arrogance and a bucketful of over-estimation of his own ability. Add an immense craving for adrenalin to that, and you have a deadly combination that will determine attitude and ultimate decision making," Spencer-Scarr told delegates.

In terms of how to develop an attitude that influences pilots to make safe decisions; Spencer-Scarr said that "there is no one single instant solution; it has to be a multifaceted and continuous approach. Regrettably, we are also noting that some pilots attitudes toward training are totally negative once they have acquired a licence. Once these pilots are in possession of a licence, some start to develop bad habits and begin pushing the envelope. Unfortunately, some never attempt to learn where the end of an envelope is. Instructors need to teach and show aspirant pilots 'what could eventually happen when you push the envelope too far."

Spencer-Scarr also advocated for, among others, using 'scare tactics' as he believes that "for too long the aviation industry has been concerned about hurting people's feelings and thus sweeping the ugly reality under the carpet. Be that as it may, the industry must simply accept that the current accident rate is unacceptable and be willing to do something to change the status quo. We need to make regular visits to flying clubs and schools and present a gory safety lecture. Video clips and pictures must be shown to all and sundry so that people may see how pretty they will look after they have collided with a mountain. We need to constantly remind our pilots that the hardest thing in flying is the ground."

Another speaker and author of an aviation book *Avoiding fatal flying traps*, Johan Lottering, said that a simple look at statistics as well as the types and classification of accidents invariably seems like a repetition of a previous event. "In essence it is a matter of the same story, just on a different day! What is urgently required is a new perspective on air safety management among aviators, administrators and role players in order to achieve a vitally needed paradigm shift. Recurring accidents in the general aviation sector can neither be outlawed, nor prevented by more rules and 'policing' of aviators. It thus points to the fact that aviators, passengers and role players must deal with frequently overlooked *group dynamic influences*, interactions, tensions and conflicts; directly or indirectly affecting flight safety," said Lottering.

According to Lottering neither the lone private pilot nor his more qualified counterpart, the corporate pilot, seems to be able to withstand pressure and influence from passengers. These pressures, he said, are not always conducive to air safety. "A closer look at the causal factors of some of the accidents suggests the pilots had succumbed to pressures from the very people whose lives had been at stake. In most cases, unable to resist, the pilot would fly in weather he was unable to cope with thus leading to aircraft colliding with, among others, high terrain obscured by clouds. Saying 'no' when appropriate must be justifiable in the eyes of not only pilots, but those who attempt to pressurize them and influence their decisions.

"The mentality of 'it won't happen to me' is unfortunately rampant. It thus comes as no surprise that all over the world, accident statistics and studies reveal why general aviation is considered to be the stepchild of aviation. General aviation in South Africa is no exception. Moreover, flying in light aircraft can be eight to ten times less safe than airline travel. The root causes of errors are still traceable to similar origins such as complacency, system overload and downright pride and arrogance. Pilots continue to fly into the ground with the best avionic equipment at their disposal. Aviation safety should no longer be a mere 'by-product' of abiding by the rules," Lottering said.

Military aviation veteran, General Des Barker, argued that some pilots may be suffering from *Aeronautical Automation Addiction*. This he described as the complete submission, reliance, capitulation and belief in technology to automatically and accurately control flight. Gen. Barker also said that regulators, have over the years, exercised their mandate in directing safety conventions in accordance with existing knowledge and experience. "However, we should be asking ourselves whether regulators and pilots comprehend the fact that pilot training is not keeping up with technological innovation," said Gen. Barker.

Gen. Barker further questioned the idea of reliance on technology to ameliorate emergencies; adding that within the global pilot community, there is a general concern at the lack of basic situational awareness and handling capabilities in the cockpits. "In several accident cases, the causes could be traced back to pilots' inadequate 'hands-on' abilities or loss of situational awareness operating the latest generation aircraft."

Gen. Barker argued that current training regimens focus on mechanical failures, thus leading to inadequate consideration for technological failures. "Regulatory authorities should intervene to ensure the matching of training between human and technologies." He concluded by asking delegates to ponder whether automation error is going to be the new human factor contribution to accident statistics. "In simple terms, how is the aviation community going to deal with the training requirements to deal with automated systems," concluded Gen. Barker.

Some of the expected outcomes of the seminar include:

- Establish practical initiatives to reduce accident rate in half by 2014 in accordance with millennium goals;
- Reviewing the adequacy of current training systems, especially in relation to technological developments and human capabilities;
- Finding innovative ways to enhance aviation safety and security awareness;
- Change the existing aviation culture and personal attitudes to that of voluntary compliance; and

- Cultivate a culture of participatory engagement amongst all aviation stakeholders.

-ENDS-

About the SACAA:

The South African Civil Aviation Authority ("SACAA") is a juristic body established in terms of the Civil Aviation Act, 2009 (Act No. 13 of 2009) ("the Act"). SACAA is governed and controlled by the Civil Aviation Authority Board ("the Board"). In terms of mandate, the SACAA is tasked with promoting and maintaining a safe, secure and sustainable civil aviation environment, by regulating and overseeing the functioning and development of the industry in an efficient, cost-effective, and customer-friendly manner according to international standards.

For more information contact:

Kabelo Ledwaba

Manager: Communications

South African Civil Aviation Authority

Tel. + 27 11 545 1511

Cell: + 27 83 451 2654

Email: ledwabak@caa.co.za