

Bush pilots need more regulation to prevent accidents

Alaska pilots have been involved in numerous accidents during the past few weeks. Many of the pilots in the accidents bear the unofficial title "Bush Pilot." The following paper was delivered at the 1980 Alaska Federation of Natives convention by Dan Perry of the Federal Aviation Administration. We felt his comments had some bearing on the recent rash of accidents.

During the 1980 Alaska Federation of Natives Convention, I worked with several people from the Bering Straits Native Corporation to introduce the Aviation Safety Resolution.

As the resolution was introduced and passed, it was aimed at involving the Alaska Federation of Natives as the primary users of our air taxi system in policy making processes. This type of involvement is critical, since the industry has limited motivation to improve itself in the area of safety. The industry is generally self-perpetuating, as is common to most industries.

It is interesting to note that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has "State Involvement in Aviation Safety" as a major priority. This, I understand, shows a willingness for the FAA to "pass the ball" in regards to some safety issues. With this in mind, consider some of the other major changes which are currently transforming our Air Taxi System:

1. A major shift in emphasis by the general aviation enforcement arm of the FAA to Air Taxi operations.

2. The FAA intentions to upgrade the facilities at some thirty-two airports.

3. The State of Alaska's proposal to upgrade airports, navigational aids, runway lighting, weather reporting, and communications in an unprecedented magnitude.

4. The Airline Deregulation Act.

5. The withdrawal of a major air carrier from rural Alaska.

These events may improve the aviation services to rural Alaska, but an important element has been left out of the decision-making process: the consumer.

I support the direction that

has been taken and the steps that have been accomplished. However, airports, airways, and airplanes are only as safe as the pilots who fly them. After reading the 1979 Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association report, the FAA 1980 report on general aviation accidents, the 1978 national report on general aviation accidents, and the recent report by the National Transportation Board (NTSB) on Alaskan air taxis, I have discovered a common thread - pilot error is the most common cause of accidents.

Most of these reports concern that, although the FAA has managed to produce aircraft that are as reliable as any machine produced by man, the agency has not sufficiently addressed the issues surrounding the accident cause factor known as "Pilot Error". So, it is no surprise that the State of Alaska's approach appears to be lacking in this area.

As I understand it, pilot error can be defined as the human aspects of operating a machine. Most causes of pilot error accidents appear to be psychological in nature and require analysis from this discipline. The NTSB report on Alaska air taxi system considers the "Bush Syndrome" the most significant element in the ability of Alaskan pilots to wreck planes. However, the airlines, the military, and the corporate aviation operators have all known for years the importance of personnel management in reducing risks. They have successfully reduced the rate of accidents caused by pilot error through proper personnel management.

It is my opinion that the management of our revered "Bush Pilots" is generally quite poor. Such things as vacation pay, retirement programs, company paid life insurance, company housing at remote locations, training programs, and the like are unheard of in most rural settings.

Obviously, a better working environment and fringe benefits are not the final answer to all pilot errors. They must, however, be considered in any discussion of human factors.

I do not profess to have a solution which will prevent pilots from erring but to raise the issue.

Some current events which may have an impact on the availability of pilots and therefore influence their managerial requirements are:

1. Military pay will probably increase under the Reagan Administration, thereby retaining more pilots.

2. There is likely to be a reduction of veterans benefits available for pilot training.

3. CETA programs, which have been used in some parts of the state for pilot training, will probably be cut.

4. The airline re-regulation act effecting more flights in small aircraft because of their cost effectiveness.

5. An economic development increases in the state; so will aviation activity.

If the demand for pilots does increase, the benefits offered by employers will become increasingly more important to retaining qualified personnel. Keep in mind that there could be an increasingly limited supply of pilots available to the employers who can't offer high salaries and comprehensive fringe packages; consider the probability that increased available runway, improved navigational aids and more sophisticated equipment requires a higher skilled pilot.

Another area of importance which needs careful consideration is insurance. In my opinion,

aviation insurance in Alaska takes on the characteristics of a statewide no-fault policy with the results of having only one market for Alaskans to buy from and at rapidly increasing prices. This type of management only encourages carelessness and breeds weak competitors in the aviation industry.

It is my opinion that regulatory control might be necessary to improve the management of aviation insurance and create new, competitive markets for us to buy from.

So, in closing, I am asking the legislature to add more considerations for the professional pilot in its approach to improv-

ing our air transportation system and to do an in-depth probe into the aviation insurance situation.

I personally believe that the cost benefit ratio of these pursuits are greater than some of the sophisticated capital improvements which have been proposed.

-Dan Perry

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