

Keep internal airline safety reports secret: pilots' union

Don Butler, Ottawa Citizen

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Internal safety reports by airline employees need to be kept secret to promote a culture of safety within the aviation industry, says the union that represents Air Canada's 3,300 pilots.

"Virtually everyone who's looked at this from a safety point of view has recognized the need for a confidential reporting system," says Andy Wilson, president of the Air Canada Pilots Association.

He was responding to criticism of Bill C-7 by the Canadian Newspaper Association and the Canadian Union of Public Employees, which represents flight attendants.

The bill, poised to receive third reading in Parliament, amends the Aeronautics Act. Among other things, it authorizes Safety Management Systems (SMS) in the aviation industry, a process that includes non-punitive confidential reporting of safety issues by airline employees.

CUPE and the newspaper association strenuously object to clauses that exempt those safety reports from Access to Information, warning that a "curtain of secrecy" is poised to descend over aviation safety problems.

But the pilots union, the airline industry and Transport Canada all deny that implementing SMS means greater secrecy, saying everything that is now publicly available will remain available.

Mr. Wilson says the reports covered by the proposed confidentiality clauses contain internal company information that often wasn't even generated in the past and has never been public in any case.

Lucie Vignola, a special communications adviser at Transport Canada, says the confidential information is "proprietary information in terms of competitive advantage. So that's not for us to give out."

Without confidentiality, airline employees would be far less likely to report safety problems, Mr. Wilson says, because they wouldn't want to see their own mistakes "on the bulletin board."

SMS encourages voluntary reporting by promising confidentiality and avoiding a punitive response.

The experience of Air Transat, the first Canadian carrier to adopt SMS, proves the value of that approach, Mr. Wilson says.

"We know that the reporting increased by a factor of several hundred per cent. There's no reason to think that the number of incidents increased at all - it's the reporting that increased."

The additional reporting improves safety by allowing airlines to look for systemic problems they can address, Ms. Vignola says. "If things are reported, then we can stop an accident before it happens."

Under SMS, which large carriers must fully implement by June, airlines are required to keep a record of safety reports and what they have done to address them, says Fred Gaspar, of the Air Transport Association of Canada, an industry group. Transport Canada is able to audit and review those files, he says.

Stephen Guetta, chairman of the pilots union's accidents investigation committee, likens the confidential reporting system to "the ultimate employee message box."

Compared to the United States, Canada is "much further along" when it comes to implementing SMS, which has been mandated for adoption by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Mr. Guetta says.

Mr. Wilson says airline pilots support Bill C-7, even though they are already "the most monitored group of people in the world. We're wired. It's pretty intrusive, and yet we welcome more monitoring because we have the most direct interest possible in safety."

Mr. Guetta said Air Canada pilots have agreed to participate in a "line-oriented safety audit" (LOSA) in April and May.

About two dozen Air Canada pilots will write detailed reports on the actions of pilots on 310 flights over a six-week period to determine how well the airline's standard operating procedures are working.

"It's a little intimidating," Mr. Guetta concedes. "But the point is our line pilots will accept that if it's conducted by one of their peers."

While reports generated by the SMS process will be confidential, information about safety incidents and violations will continue to be available on Transport Canada's website, Ms. Vignola says.

Since last year, reports on safety-related incidents have been posted online in the department's Civil Aviation Daily Occurrence Report. And summaries of punitive action against companies that break safety rules are posted on Transport Canada's "corporate offenders" website.



330 Sparks Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0N8

Your file / Votre référence
XC-4427

March 4, 2008

Kevin Gauthier
12-53rd St
Wasaga Beach, Ontario
L9Z 1W8

Dear Mr. Kevin Gauthier:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your documents forwarded to Transport Canada from the Transportation Safety Board of Canada.

According to your documents you have concerns regarding a safety report you submitted to your previous employer and union, resulting in eventual termination of your employment. Also you still have not received an official response to your safety report and are concerned these practices are still ongoing, these practices being premature parking break release or set in order to improve the air carriers on time performance.

For your records, these concerns have been submitted to the Civil Aviation Issues Reporting System (CAIRS) for action and have been assigned file no. XC-4427.

For your information the issues raised in your e-mail will be forwarded to the appropriate Transport Canada Accountable Manager for review and response. The CAIRS process provides the accountable manager 20 working days within which to prepare a response to your concerns. Once the Report Coordinator has received the response, a copy will be forwarded directly to you.

In the meantime, should you have any questions or if I can be of any other assistance to you in this matter please do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail at cairs_ncr@tc.gc.ca.

Sincerely,

Kelsey Lamb
Report Coordinator (CAIRS)
Management Services | Civil Aviation | Transport Canada

Coordonnatrice des signalements (SSQAC)
Services de gestion | Aviation civile | Transports Canada

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Subject: Civil Aviation Issues Reporting System (CAIRS) XC-4427
Date: Thu, 27 Mar 2008 09:42:44 -0400
From: "CAIRS / SSQAC_National" <CAIRS_NCR@tc.gc.ca>
To: rockev@rogers.com

Good Morning Mr. Gauthier

The Accountable Manager assigned to your CAIRS file is going to need contribution from another Branch here at Transport Canada. However, there is a need for the name of the Airline you worked for in order to determine whether it should be National Operations or International Operations. I remember you saying you were an International Pilot, but the way National or International is determined here actually depends on the Airline itself.

If you could provide this information that would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you

Kelsey Lamb
Report Coordinator (CAIRS)
Management Services | Civil Aviation | Transport Canada

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Date: Thu, 27 Mar 2008 10:21:04 -0400 (EDT)

From: "KEVIN GAUTHIER" <rokev@rogers.com>

Subject: Re: Civil Aviation Issues Reporting System (CAIRS) XC-4427

To: "CAIRS / SSQAC_National" <CAIRS_NCR@tc.gc.ca>

Good Day Madame Lamb,

The airline I last worked for and the one being referenced is Air Canada.

Kevin Gauthier

CAIRS / SSQAC_National <CAIRS_NCR@tc.gc.ca> wrote:

Good Morning Mr. Gauthier

The Accountable Manager assigned to your CAIRS file is going to need contribution from another Branch here at Transport Canada. However, there is a need for the name of the Airline you worked for in order to determine whether it should be National Operations or International Operations. I remember you saying you were an International Pilot, but the way National or International is determined here actually depends on the Airline itself.

If you could provide this information that would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you

Kelsey Lamb
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2410



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Subject: CAIRS File XC-4427
Date: Mon, 28 Apr 2008 13:49:32 -0400
From: "Taylor, Jennifer" <TAYLOJJ@tc.gc.ca>
To: rockev@rogers.com
CC: "CAIRS / SSQAC_National" <CAIRS_NCR@tc.gc.ca>

> Dear Mr. Gauthier:
>
> As you are aware, your submission regarding your affidavit was
> entered into the Civil Aviation Issues Reporting System (CAIRS) and assigned
> reference number XC-4427.
>
> At the outset, please note that the mandate of the Transport Canada,
> Civil Aviation Directorate, is to ensure that the appropriate framework
> and oversight programs are in place for the safe operation of the
> Canadian aviation system. We review every CAIRS submission to determine
> compliance, or lack thereof, with Canadian Aviation Regulations (CARs),
> which form the basis for safety regulation in the Canadian aviation
> system.
>
> As you are no doubt aware, with the recent implementation of Safety
> Management System (SMS) regulations, an increased onus has been placed
> on certified aviation companies concerning their proactive management of
> the risks that are associated with their operations.
>
> In previous correspondence with you we indicated that we were
> satisfied that Air Canada was dealing in an appropriate manner with your
> expressed concerns. We have since confirmed that Air Canada's
> corrective action plan has been effective in managing the number of roll-back
> incidents.
>
> At this time I consider the safety matters relating to roll-backs to
> be effectively managed by the company, and I will not be re-examining
> the factors relating to roll-back incidents. Nevertheless, Air Canada's
> SMS is being closely monitored and if additional incidents
> indicate that this issue needs to be readdressed, Transport Canada will ensure
> that appropriate action is taken.
>
> I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for sharing your
> views, as all comments we receive are appreciated.
>
> Sincerely,
>
>
> Jennifer J. Taylor
> Director
> National Operations
> Civil Aviation

25/6