FEDERAL REPORT CRITICIZES FAA'S OVERSIGHT OF AVIATION SAFETY ACTION PROGRAM

May 27, 2009

What's at Issue

The Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted an audit of the implementation of Aviation Safety Action Programs (ASAP) by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The audit found a number of issues with the oversight of ASAP by the FAA, and the OIG made recommendations for the FAA to review and implement.

Why It's Important

ASAP is widely recognized as a valuable safety reporting tool. That the audit review board found issues with the oversight and management of the ASAP program could jeopardize the continuance of the program if not quickly addressed by the FAA. Some airlines have already discontinued their ASAP programs due to misperceptions and conflicting views of the program.

Major Provisions

The following findings and recommendations from the audit were brought to the attention of the FAA:

1. ASAP guidance lacks clarity regarding which incidents should be excluded from the program. It is recommended that the FAA revise current ASAP guidance to exclude accidents from the program and clarify what constitutes an "intentional disregard for safety."

2. FAA inspectors do not have timely access to ASAP reports. The FAA should require that agency representatives on Event Review Committees (ERCs) receive ASAP reports in a timely manner and concurrently with other ERC members.

3. ASAP is misperceived as an amnesty program. It is recommended that the FAA modify Advisory Circular 120-66B to clarify that ASAP is not an amnesty program and that employees submitting ASAP reports are subject to administrative action by the FAA and to corrective action by the air carrier, such as additional check rides or simulator training. These actions are sometimes mistakenly perceived as punitive by pilots.

4. FAA's ASAP training does not emphasize the need for ERC members to be impartial. The FAA should revise its ERC training to emphasize the need for FAA's ERC members to remain impartial and require periodic refresher training in this area.

5. FAA inspector reports do not include sufficient information on ASAP events or carriers' corrective actions. The FAA should implement standardized ASAP guidance regarding quarterly report submissions to ensure that they include, at a minimum, summary information regarding the ASAP reports submitted.

(Major Provisions Continued)

6. Require inspectors to examine repetitive reports of safety concerns and enhancements to ensure that corrective actions are completed in a satisfactory manner.

7. FAA lacks a process to collect and analyze ASAP data effectively. A central database of all air carriers' ASAP reports that the agency can use for trend analysis at a national level needs to be developed.

The FAA agreed with all recommendations provided by the OIG except the recommendation for accidents to be excluded from the ASAP program. Currently, the FAA and the National Transportation Safety Board are in consultation on whether accidents should be excluded from acceptance into ASAP. All other recommendations were accepted, and revisions to ASAP documentations and training will be completed by December 2010.

NATA Position
ASAP is a voluntary reporting program that allows employees to self-report violations without fear of punitive action. It is a cooperative program by the FAA and air carriers used to provide safety information that otherwise may not have been known. NATA views this program as a valuable tool to identifying and managing safety risks. The association is very concerned that the FAA may not have been properly managing the program and this negative evaluation could hurt the program.

Status
The OIG's report was released on May 14, 2009. NATA encourages members to view a copy of the report for more details.

Click here to view report.

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