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Canadian Federal Pilots Association
Association des Pilotes Fédéraux du Canada



Aviation inspectors condemn Transport Canada's safety system Warn of impending major accident

Ottawa (24 April, 2014) – [A new survey](#) of Canada's professional aviation inspectors reveals deepening concern about risks to the travelling public posed by a system that has them inspecting more paperwork than airplanes.

At issue is Safety Management Systems (SMS) which transfers to the airlines themselves responsibility for setting acceptable levels of risk and monitoring their own safety performance.

Abacus Data repeated several questions posed to licenced pilot aviation inspectors in 2007, soon after the introduction of aviation SMS in Canada.

The survey of both pilot and non-pilot aviation inspectors who work for Transport Canada released today has found concerns expressed seven years ago are more acute today:

- Nine-in-ten aviation inspectors report that Transport Canada's SMS **prevents** the correction of safety problems in a timely fashion, up from 80% who worried this would be the case in the early days of SMS.
- 84% of aviation inspectors expect a major aviation accident or incident in the near future after working in an SMS environment for the past seven years, up from 74% who held this view in 2007.
- Two-thirds (67%) believe Transport Canada's SMS will actually increase the chances of a major aviation accident or incident, up slightly from 2007 when 61% held this view.
- 85% of respondents believe air travellers have been exposed to higher risk as a result of Transport Canada's aviation SMS, up significantly from 2007 when 67% forecast this outcome.

"Minister Raitt should see this as a major red flag. We've already seen the major accident inspectors feared when a First Air jet crashed in Nunavut in 2011. The next crash could be in Toronto or some other major Canadian city," said Captain Daniel Slunder, President of the Canadian Federal Pilots Association which co-sponsored the survey.

Just months before a First Air jet crashed in Nunavut, killing twelve passengers and crew, a Transport Canada assessment found no problems with the airline's Safety Management System.

Faced with dwindling inspection resources, Transport Canada has progressively extended its mandatory frequency of inspection of airlines with SMS from 1 year to three years. Today, an airline could go uninspected for as much as five years under the current policy.

“For aviation, Safety Management Systems are less about safety than budget cuts at Transport Canada. Gone are the days of unannounced in-person inspections or even regular inspections thanks to the focus being placed on audits of a company’s SMS paperwork. For many operators, we simply cannot verify they are functioning safely because we really can’t look at their operations so we just don’t know,” said Christine Collins, President of the Union of Canadian Transportation Employees which represents the technical aviation inspectors at Transport Canada.

SMS was always intended to be an additional layer of regulation to supplement direct operational oversight involving the inspection of actual equipment, maintenance procedures, pilot check rides and unannounced ramp checks.

But a serious shortage of inspectors has forced Transport Canada to all but abandon direct operational oversight and rely almost exclusively on audits and validations of a company’s SMS through documentation reviews and staff interviews.

“To add insult to injury, Transport Canada is now placing emphasis on soft skills such as communications instead of technical expertise when it plans to staff the vacancies. Safety of the travelling public should not be compromised in this manner,” said Christine Collins.

Serious problems with Transport Canada’s SMS and its implementation have been documented by the Auditor General of Canada on more than one occasion. In particular, the Auditor General has taken the department to task for its failure to:

- complete required SMS audits and traditional inspections;
- know how many inspectors are required to carry out its oversight responsibilities and what skills they need; and
- understand the safety risks associated with the introduction of SMS.

“The House of Commons Transport Committee, which is studying safety oversight, should pay close attention to this report. The opinions of this expert group show that Transport Canada’s aviation SMS has gone terribly wrong,” said Captain Daniel Slunder.

The survey was conducted in English and French from February 13 to March 14, 2014 using an internet survey programmed and collected by Abacus Data. 80% of respondents (226) are licenced pilot inspectors represented by the Canadian Federal Pilots Association (CFPA). The balance (58) are Technical Inspectors represented by the Union of Canadian Transport Employees (UCTE). Respondents were invited to participate in the study by email. The response rate among licenced pilots was 60% and 23% for Technical Inspectors.

Based on the response rate and the sample composition, the results of the survey should be considered representative of the opinions of aviation inspectors employed by Transport Canada.