

Failure to meet international aviation safety laws
places Canadian air passengers at risk

By Greg Holbrook

Canada's enviable air safety record is the product of years of careful oversight of the airline industry by Transport Canada.

But all that is changing with proposals from Ottawa. Safety Management Systems (SMS) are replacing the system of airline safety oversight, and legislative proposals will transfer responsibility for safety to the airline industry itself.

We've already seen Ottawa backing out of its safety responsibilities. As a result, Canada is breaking international safety laws set by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Here's how.

ICAO Standards dictate that airline companies are audited by the regulator on an annual basis.

Transport Canada policies used to require that airline companies be audited every three years.

But, as of March 2006 Transport Canada killed the National Audit program covering the 8 largest airlines in this country. This activity has not been replaced by any form of direct oversight by any part of Transport Canada. Transport Canada is fully aware of this fact and has decided to accept the associated risks.

ICAO Standards dictate that airports are audited every three years.

Transport Canada policies used to require that airports be audited every five years.

As of March 2006 Transport Canada killed the National Audit program covering the 5 largest airports in this country. This activity has not been replaced by any form of direct oversight by any part of Transport Canada. Transport Canada is fully aware of this fact and has decided to accept the associated risks.

ICAO Standards require that pilots that operate aircraft internationally shall successfully complete a Pilot Proficiency Check every 6 months.

Transport Canada standards only require pilots to successfully complete a Pilot Proficiency Check once every 2 years.

ICAO found Canadian in violation of this standard in their 2005 audit of Transport Canada and recommended compliance with international standards. Transport Canada has not yet done so.

To effectively protect the traveling public, the airlines cannot be left to their own devices when it comes to safety.

Safety Management Systems must be accompanied by effective regulatory oversight including the monitoring, surveillance and audits of air carriers to international

standards, as mandated by international civil aviation Conventions and international agreements between Canada and ICAO member states.

Ottawa's plans to allow the airlines to set acceptable risk levels themselves and to take over safety duties Transport Canada has performed invites increased risk for passengers. The bottom line economic considerations of the airlines will be factored into safety decisions.

Against this backdrop, it's not surprising that the licenced pilots who work as aviation inspectors for Transport Canada would blow the whistle on their safety concerns. The public and politicians would be foolish to ignore this red flag.

Greg Holbrook is National Chair of the Canadian Federal Pilots Association