

EU Flight-Time Rules Endanger Passenger Lives

U.K. Pilots Say (Bloomberg) European Union rules will put lives at risk by increasing the number of hours that airline pilots are allowed to fly in one stretch, Britain's cockpit union said.

Proposals from the EU's European Aviation Safety Agency will limit flying to 13 hours and 55 minutes -- more than one-third longer than the 10 hour, 15 minute limit under current U.K. regulations, the British Airline Pilots Association said.

EASA has ignored scientific evidence that up to 20 percent of accidents are caused by fatigue, Balpa said in a statement. The agency, which implements and monitors aviation safety rules in the EU, aims to introduce the new limits by April next year.

"Fatigue is a growing problem as more and more demands are made of pilots," Balpa General Secretary Jim McAuslan said in the release. "British passengers who have enjoyed the safest flying in the world are now to be put at risk."

EASA always prioritizes safety and devised the proposals after consulting with pilots, airlines and aviation authorities, said Dominique Fouda, an agency spokesman in Cologne, Germany.

The European Low Fares Airline Association, a 10-member lobby group with members including Ryanair Holdings Plc and EasyJet Plc, the region's biggest discount carriers, said in December it rejected "unsubstantiated" claims from pilot and cabin crew unions that EU rules are unsafe. Balpa said it will coordinate its lobbying effort with other pilot groups around Europe and participate in studies on stress and fatigue being carried out by U.K. universities.

An increase in flying hours would also run counter to U.S. plans to boost rest times between shifts as part of an overhaul of rules prompted by a crash in Buffalo, New York, that killed 50 people in 2009, the union said.

"The industry has taken its eye off the ball," McAuslan said in a briefing. "The commercial side is trumping safety and it's no longer something that people can take for granted."