

IFALPA Supports APU at NTSB Investigative Hearing into Asiana Flight 214

Washington, DC — On Wednesday, The International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (IFALPA) and the Air Line Pilots' Association, International (ALPA-I) supported the Asiana Pilot Union (APU) as they participated in the National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) investigative hearing on the Asiana 214 accident, which occurred on 6 July 2013 upon landing at San Francisco International Airport, resulting in three deaths and more than 180 injuries. This marks the first time in more than 20 years IFALPA has partaken in a hearing in support of a member association.

Today's hearing concentrated on pilots' understanding of the Boeing 777 aircraft's automated speed-control feature design as well as airline training, human factors and airport emergency response. Documents were discussed that indicated that concerns regarding the automated controls, particularly the 'autothrottle wake up' feature, had been identified as a potential safety hazard due to the possibility of pilot misunderstanding, one such document being EASA's B787 DeBrief Note issued in May 2011. IFALPA believes that for modern sophisticated airline aircraft, the combination of automation capability, aircraft design, certification and subsequent pilot training on critical systems must be carefully developed and validated to be comprehensive in order to ensure we maintain the high level of safety that our industry has achieved.

IFALPA acknowledges that the pilot's job in the cockpit has evolved over time into one that is increasingly reliant on the accuracy of automation. Although automation tools allow the pilot to devote more time to the mental tasks associated with flying, the pilot must remain vigilant for potential environmental "threats", and this has the potential for the crew to become less involved with the physical manipulation of the aircraft.

IFALPA systematically rejects the notion that pilots are 'forgetting how to fly'. "Automated systems actually require the pilot to be more of a pilot, and systems of systems manager. Pilots' knowledge and skill have actually increased as a result of increased automation," said Capt. Dave McKenney, Human Factors Chairman for IFALPA. FAA's Dr. Kathy Abbott also testified to the value of a well-trained airline pilot as a critical means to identify and mitigate hazards in modern flight deck operations. Used properly and combined with a thorough training, both in "hand-flying" and use of automation as with all aircraft systems, computerized cockpit features can greatly benefit the pilot and aircraft passengers. "We apply automation as a tool to support the pilot, not replace the pilot," said witness Capt. John Cashman, retired Boeing B777 Chief Pilot. Like any tool, automation must properly be used, and its use can vary from flight to flight.

Following NTSB Chairman Deborah A.P. Hersman's opening statement, the hearing witnesses, which included representatives of the Federal Aviation Administration, Boeing, Asiana Airlines, and the Korean Office of Civil Aviation, were introduced. Four technical panels were formed to answer questions from NTSB Board members, technical staff, and parties about flight deck design concepts and characteristics, pilot training on automated systems and visual approach procedures, pilot awareness in highly automated aircraft, emergency response, and cabin safety.

IFALPA Executive Vice-President Professional Affairs Capt. Fanie Coetzee and former IFALPA Representative to ICAO, Capt. Paul McCarthy, and representatives from ALPA-Korea and ALPA-I supported the APU team through the proceedings, while Capt. Dave McKenney served as a witness in Panel 3: Effects and Influence of Automation on Human Performance in the Accident Sequence.



Witnesses and technical panels sit before the NTSB Board and Chairman Deborah A.P. Hersman

In the wake of the hearing, IFALPA reiterates its strong support for an objective accident investigation process through the collection of all the facts needed to draw an accurate analysis of events that may lead to an accident in the appropriate operational context.

IFALPA appreciates the opportunity to participate in this hearing and would like to thank the NTSB for recognizing the value of the international pilot voice by making the APU a party to the hearing, and thank the APU for allowing us to help them through this process. It is important that the APU and IFALPA be involved in this hearing, as we were able to bring a wealth of aviation experience to the proceedings. IFALPA's resources are at the disposal of the NTSB or any state investigative agency, and we freely offer our assistance in gathering those facts and any other information, which may be pertinent to this or any other case.

Note to Editors: The International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations represents in excess of 100,000 pilots in more than 100 countries worldwide. IFALPA's mission is to be the global voice of airline pilots, promoting the highest level of aviation safety and security world-wide and providing services, support and representation to all of its Member Associations.

See the Federation's website: www.ifalpa.org

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