



Resolution calling for "scheduled air transport by two pilots at all times"

July 25, 2024 ALPA Japan Executive Committee

Since around 2020, aircraft manufacturers have been proposing to have one pilot in the cockpit (RCO = Reduced Crew Operations, eMCO = extended minimum crew operations) during cruising in order to respond to the requests from customer airlines and the expected shortage of pilots in the future.

After World War II, the crew of commercial aircraft decreased from five (captain, co-pilot, flight engineer, navigator, and communications officer) to four and then three. This was driven by increased innovation, automation, and the development of navigational aids, but it also increased the workload of pilots and reduced labor costs for airlines.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the ALPA Japan led the world in the fight against the need for flight engineers for the safe operation of large aircraft in the crew configurations of the B767 and B747-400. Ultimately, almost all of the large commercial aircraft currently in service around the world are composed of two pilots, (Captain and First Officer), but the idea that "the crew members themselves should verify the safety technology, rather than leaving it to the manufacturer or airline" gained through the battle of demanding the three-men cockpit, has been inherited as the core idea of ALPA Japan.

The biggest and final cause of aviation accidents is said to be human error, and the safety measures currently being implemented by each company are mainly focused on how two pilots can mutually check each other to prevent and cover errors.

At first glance, it seems that the workload is low during cruising, and even one person seems to be able to operate safely with an automated system, high-precision navigation using GPS, and an automatic communication system using satellites, but there is possibility of disturbance of navigation devices called GPS jamming and spoofing, sudden changes of weather, and pilot incapacitation, which have become problems in recent years. When the workload expands exponentially under these conditions, it cannot be ruled out that things could escalate catastrophically before another pilot could be brought back to the cockpit.

Through the IFALPA General Assembly, the GPS = Global Pilots' Symposium, and other IFALPA Committees, we have been in contact with pilot unions throughout of world, and have been working to gather information.

IFALPA and other pilot organizations are running a campaign called Safety Starts with Two, saying that "trying to have one man cockpit is a risky gamble."

Manufacturers such as Boeing and Airbus argue that it is technically possible to operate unmanned aircraft as well as one-person operation with current technology, but whether or not it will be realized depends on each airline, pilot, and passenger user who accepts or not.

As a labor union organization for civil aircraft pilots in Japan, we will cooperate with related organizations to ensure safe operations, take necessary measures, and advocate for "scheduled air transportation by two pilots at all times."

