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Welcome to the e-news of IAOPA-Europe, which goes out to 23,000 aircraft owners and pilots in 27 countries across the continent

EASA plans its change of direction

A series of meetings involving the European Commission, EASA and its Board of Management is establishing exactly how EASA is going to comply with the EC's demand for a change of direction, and a reversion to ICAO and JAR rules where it is desirable. Sources say EASA will be instructed to put general aviation to the back of the queue and concentrate on commercial air transport, and on known safety issues which urgently need to be remedied.

EASA is overwhelmed with problems of its own making, having rewritten huge numbers of aviation regulations and sought to introduce new restrictions without any real reason for them. The reaction to its recent Notice of Proposed Amendment on Operations illustrates the problem; EASA has received 13,000 objections from industry. Some 40 percent are from helicopter operators who would be particularly hard-hit by EASA's proposals, one of which, for example, would require all helicopters flying over virtually any water to be fitted with floats. This would be hugely costly for most operators and impossible for many, and there is absolutely no evidence of need; it would not address any known accident pattern. Yet nobody can find out who in EASA proposed the requirement, how much work was done on it, or why it was dreamed up in the first place.

The EC's patience with EASA is running out. Deputy DGTREN director Zoltan Kazatsay wrote an impatient letter urging EASA to stop reinventing the wheel and added: "The Commission believes the time has come to take clear decisions to steer the Agency in a different direction. In this respect it is essential to carefully consider the alternative of going back to the original structure and wording wherever possible of JARs and ICAO requirements, which should be transposed into Community law."

EASA's 'new direction' is expected to be announced in the next two months, and while a respite from unwarranted new demands will be welcome, GA does not want to see the baby thrown out with the bathwater. IAOPA-Europe's Deputy Vice President Martin Robinson says: "Some of EASA's proposals would improve safety, and they should not all be abandoned because of the Agency's inefficiency."



The achievable IR

One of the most important proposals is the establishment of a new Instrument Rating with a vastly reduced nonsense quotient in the theoretical knowledge; EASA must not drop this initiative now. The JAA was working on the problem long before EASA took over, so it must be seen as an existing JAA programme which should be protected under the 'reversion to ICAO and JARs' guidance of the EC.

The IR proposals may be safeguarded because they help to address one of EASA's basic objectives, which is to get third country operations out of Europe – particularly those on the N-register. The primary reason European aircraft are registered in America is because while the flying skills required for the FAA IR are higher than in Europe, the theoretical knowledge requirements are far more sensible and make the rating achievable for private pilots. More than 50 percent of American PPLs have an Instrument Rating, compared to about one percent of PPLs in, for example, the United Kingdom. EASA head Patrick Goudou told IAOPA in 2005 it was his intention to ensure there were "no advantages" to being on the N-register.

Airspace proposal resurrected

Eurocontrol is reopening the debate about airspace classifications with a view to simplifying the airspace structure, something it appeared to have abandoned only a year ago. When the subject was last raised, it was clear that the aviation industry preferred to stick with the ICAO classifications. As part of the Single European Sky programme Eurocontrol proposed that Europe adopt only two classifications of airspace, known and unknown; the industry thought, however, that classifications should as far as possible be global, and Eurocontrol quietly shelved the idea.

For reasons unknown, however, the proposal has been resurrected, this time as a plan to reduce airspace classifications to three or four in coming years, with the ultimate aim of having only two. While Eurocontrol accepts the ICAO classifications are "part of the toolbox" it is clear that they still

want to rationalise them further. IAOPA's Martin Robinson says: "We thought this had gone away but Eurocontrol has begun canvassing member states about it again. The EC, and the Eurocontrol states which are not EU members, wish to retain the eight ICAO classifications below FL195, but the member states implement that airspace in different ways. Largely because of the complexities of fitting traffic into regional airports, it is desirable to retain the flexibility that the ICAO classifications provide, and IAOPA-Europe is not convinced that Eurocontrol's proposals have merit."

What price security?

The European Commission is consulting on a proposal to create Europe-wide regulations on security costs at all airports, and IAOPA-Europe is concerned to ensure that general aviation is not caught up in the collateral damage. Transport Commissioner Antonio Tajani says information on security-related charges is inadequate, and a level playing field must be established across Europe for the benefit of airlines and passengers. The EC proposes to establish a special bureaucracy in every state to oversee airport security charges.

While these proposals are aimed strictly at airlines, there is no information on how general aviation terminals and their users will be treated. IAOPA is seeking more details from national governments and the EC and will respond to the consultation before it ends on September 25th.

SESAR results within a year

The 'kick-off' meeting in the next stage of the SESAR programme will be held in Brussels on Monday September 7th, and IAOPA will be represented by Dr Michael Erb of AOPA Germany and Ben Stanley, an aviation consultant who has been employed by AOPA UK for the duration of the deliberations. Eurocontrol's stated intention is to "achieve something within twelve months that will be of benefit to general aviation". IAOPA fully supports that aim.

An unleaded future?

The Swedish government has asked its Transport Agency to look at creating a new environmental class for unleaded avgas in order to tax it at a lower rate. Unleaded avgas cannot conform to the legal requirements of unleaded car fuel because of the special conditions in which it is required to operate, but the Swedish government recognises the environmental benefits of unleaded avgas and is keen to promote its use with tax concessions.

Unleaded avgas in Sweden is provided by Hjelmco Oil, run by the former head of AOPA Sweden, Lars Hjelmberg. It is also produced in Poland and France. It is a tiny market, but the Swedes hope it can be grown. The

government's statement says: "A Swedish environmental class for unleaded aviation gasoline may serve as a model to the aviation gasoline market and possibly expedite a transition to unleaded aviation gasoline within the EU and the rest of the world." Sweden took over the presidency of the EU in July and has announced its intention to use its term in office to advance environmental causes.

Diary dates

Don't forget – the 121st Regional Meeting of IAOPA-Europe will be held in Barcelona from October 1st to October 4th. Book your ticket now! Looking ahead, the 2010 IAOPA World Assembly will be held in Tel Aviv from 6th June to 10th June next year. AOPA Israel intends to publish a website containing details shortly.