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UK NEWS

EU 'WILL PUT LIVES AT RISK' WITH NEW LIVE AIRLINE PILOT RULES



Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin

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By John Ingham

A FATHER whose daughter died in an air crash partly blamed on pilot fatigue yesterday attacked new EU flying rules he says will put lives at risk.

Scott Maurer's fears are supported by pilots' union Balpa, which claimed the changes could mean some pilots would stay awake for 24 hours because their hours on standby would rise.

Pilots' union Balpa accuses the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) of weakening Britain's safety rules in the name of EU-wide harmonisation of rules.

In an open letter to new Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin, US businessman Mr Maurer, whose daughter Lorin was killed three years ago, said:

“All of these proposals risk the safety of the flying public and the pilots who provide these services.

“We also note that there is a lack of science in the development of these proposals.

“What value do you place on your loved ones? How do you value the loss that would occur if a commercial aircraft crashed into a crowded arena because of fatigued pilots?

“Before our tragedy I would likely have said:

‘What are the chances that will happen? One in 20,000,000?’ Sadly, I now know that fatigued pilots increase those odds exponentially.”

The plans are expected to be introduced by the end of 2015 subject to the approval of European Union member states.

Earlier this year MPs on the all-party Transport Select Committee warned the new rules risked “jeopardising safety”.

They accused EASA of planning to lower Britain’s high standards by pursuing a “lowest common denominator” approach across the EU.

Balpa says the proposals could lead to pilots:

- Flying longer at night than scientists say is safe.
- Spending 30 per cent longer on standby before being called for duty, meaning they could be awake for more than 24 hours.
- Available for twice as many early starts in a row compared to current UK standards.
- Being on duty 15 per cent more over two weeks.

Balpa general secretary Jim McAuslan said:

“There are one or two improvements but, by and large, these proposals are even worse than the previous draft.

“Scott Maurer and all the families affected by the crash of Continental flight 3407 – which killed 50 people in Buffalo, New York – know what the impact of fatigued pilots can be.

“Today’s announcement by EASA will simply make it more likely that pilots will have to fly more tired more often and therefore increase the risk of a similar accident in the UK.”

He added: “The UK has the safest skies in Europe but the Government seems ready to ditch all that in favour of harmonisation.

“Neither pilots nor public will understand the sense in that.”

But Britain’s air watchdog, the Civil Aviation Authority, yesterday said the new rules will benefit UK passengers and will not compromise safety.

It claimed there will be a 16-hour cap on combined airport standby and flight duty.

Safety director Gretchen Haskins said:

“Passenger safety is our number one priority, which we will never compromise.”

EASA said the proposals were based on 50 scientific studies and consultation within the industry, including pilots.