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EU PILOT RULES ‘WILL PUT LIVES IN DANGER’



Unions warn increased flight times will heighten the risk of pilots falling asleep

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By John Ingham

PASSENGERS’ lives will be endangered by new EU rules which will heighten the risk of pilots falling asleep in the cockpit, MPs were told.

Balpa, the pilots union, warned that proposals by the European Aviation Safety Agency will increase their flying hours.

It told the Transport Select Committee that in the worst case the new rules will allow pilots to land planes after being up for as long as 22 hours – including a 14-hour flight duty period.

The EU rules would also allow pilots to fly as far as California with no back-up crew. And they will let pilots do up to seven early starts in a row which Balpa claims is “desperately fatiguing”.

Cologne-based Easa says the plan is designed to “provide a level-playing field for European airlines”.

But Balpa’s head of safety, Dr Rob Hunter, an ex-long haul pilot, said: “This will lead to an increased safety risk for pilots, cabin crew and passengers. Our research shows that 43 per cent of pilots have already fallen asleep on the flight deck under current rules. I expect the new rules to lead to a worsening of this.”

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He said when Easa's rules are introduced in two years they will mean that pilots with US airlines will be better rested than their British counterparts.

Balpa secretary Jim McAuslan urged the UK's safety authority, the CAA, to rethink its backing for Easa's plan.

He said: "Twenty hours of wakefulness is not the only part of the proposals giving us serious concern. We have met with the CAA to make them realise the dangers of what is proposed here, but they seem intent on supporting this European scheme."

Last month an Easa report said its plans had taken "into account recent scientific and medical evidence".