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Longer Flight Times Could Lead To Plane Crashes, Pilots Tell MPs

The Huffington Post UK   Asa Bennett First Posted: 22/02/2012 11:03 Updated: 22/02/2012 11:11

Pilots have warned of a "danger to public safety" if longer flight times were introduced, in evidence to MPs on the Transport Committee on Tuesday morning.

MPs are scrutinising the likely impact of proposals to increase time pilots could spend on duty. With increased flight times, pilots will be more tired and prone to accidents, said Rob Hunter, head of Safety at the British Airline Pilots' Association.

Hunter revealed that, according to an internal survey done by ComRes, 43% of pilots had reported falling asleep on the flight desk and 33% said that on waking, they found the other pilot was asleep. Hunter said he believed it represents "an underestimate of the true figures" as pilots may not realise if they had just been asleep.

Louise Ellman, chair of the Transport Select Committee, described this revelation as "very scary".

This startling admission comes after the Transport Select Committee launched an inquiry into flight time limitations. Last month the [European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA)](#) published a proposal to regulate limits across Europe of flight and duty times.

Jon Horne, [from the European Cockpit Association](#), said that he expected accident rates to increase "commensurately". Horne added that accidents could be nearly six times as likely to happen in longer flights.

The heavy pressures on pilots increases the danger of fatigue, according to Hunter. Pilots risk disciplinary action if they admit they had fallen asleep during a flight. As a result, Hunter said:

"Pilots are fearful that if they report fatigue, that they'll face a quasi-disciplinary process. [For pilots] it becomes a better option to put up with it than to report it"t

Airlines themselves were to blame for the "intensely competitive [and] very unsympathetic" environment. Hunter told MPs that there was a "vague definition of safety" in the industry. He described them as "icons of the low-cost business model", adding:

"If [airlines] spend on safety today, they might go out of business tomorrow"