

Snore-tomatic pilot: Half of aircraft skippers have fallen asleep at the controls

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Reuters

Half of airline pilots polled in Britain admit they have accidentally fallen asleep at the controls of a jet.

And a third of these snoozing skippers have confessed that when they awoke they found to their dismay their cockpit colleagues were also dozing.

The alarming figures show that most pilots admit they have made mistakes because of tiredness.

But the fear of being disciplined means only around one in four captains would tell bosses when they are unfit to fly.

The European Cockpit Association, which represents pilots, released its worrying findings and warned that fatigue is a “common, dangerous and under-reported phenomenon”.

One in three pilots across Europe admitted they had nodded off while at the controls. The figures were worst among captains who were surveyed in Britain, Norway and Sweden.

An ECA spokesman said: “The only way to recover from fatigue is to get adequate rest.

“But a reality check shows this remedy is not a solution for many pilots across Europe. Long duty and standby hours, night flights and disruptive schedules often result in long periods of being awake and sleep deprivation.”

He added that pilots then have little chance of making up for the lost sleep and chronic tiredness.

Airlines say that Europe still has the strictest rules in the world when it comes to giving staff enough breaks.

After more than 6,000 pilots were polled during the past two years it was found in some countries that four out of five skippers had to cope with tiredness while in the cockpit.

In various countries at least three out of five pilots confessed to researchers that fatigue had caused them to make blunders.