

EU flying hours could put passengers 'at risk', MPs told

Airline passengers could be endangered by EU plans to allow pilots to fly longer hours, MPs have been told.



Changes in pilots' flying hours increase fatigue risk, MPs told. Photo: imagebroker / Alamy

By [David Millward](#), Transport Editor

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The British Airline Pilots Association said changes proposed by the European Aviation Safety Agency to harmonise limits across all 27 member states would increase the risk of fatigue.

Britain has some of the strictest rules in the EU which would be watered down if the changes went ahead, the Transport Select Committee heard.

According to Balpa the proposals would increase the number of hours a pilot could spend at work from 16 hours 15 minutes a day to 20 hours.

Allowing for the time pilots spend getting to work at the start of a shift, this could mean they could be at the controls of an aircraft as much as 22 hours after they got up.

Other changes, Balpa said, would increase the maximum shift time for a long haul flight with two pilots from 12 to 14 hours.

This change would spare airlines the expense of having to pay for a third pilot on the flight deck for long haul flights to destinations such as Los Angeles.

The Easa proposals would also increase the workload on short-haul pilots who perform several take-offs and landings a day.

Proposed changes would only see the daily flight time reduced after the third take off of the day which, pilots say, flies in the face of scientific evidence of the dangers of fatigue brought on by performing the manoeuvres several times a day.

According to Balpa the proposed changes would be illegal in the United States. “Twenty-two hours of wakefulness is far from the only part of the proposals which give us serious concern,” said Jim McAuslan, the union’s general secretary.

“Compared to the UK’s domestic rules, the EU proposals would see pilots being able to fly further – as far as California – with no backup crew and, contrary to scientific advice, allow pilots to do up to seven early starts in a row, which is desperately fatiguing.”

However the Civil Aviation Authority backed the proposed changes. “Overall we now think the current proposal, together with other regulations, such as the European Work Time Directive, and our continuous oversight of airlines, provides a package that will work for Europe,” a spokesman said.

“It will raise safety levels across many countries whose airlines UK citizens use which currently have lower levels of regulation on pilot hours and, as part of the overall UK safety regulation regime, maintains an equivalent level of safety to that which we currently have in the UK.”