

Safety 'risk' of new pilot hours

(UKPA)

Proposed European rules for plane pilots' flying hours and working conditions must be improved or safety could be at risk, a report by MPs has said.

Night-time pilot duty proposals are a particular worry, said the House of Commons Transport Committee.

Committee chairman Louise Ellman said: "We are also concerned at the possibility that a pilot could land a plane after 22 hours awake."

The committee has examined draft proposals from the European Aviation Safety Agency (Easa) to change the rules that govern how many hours a pilot can fly.

It said airlines welcomed the proposals but cabin crew and pilot representatives criticised the move, "stating that it would have a negative impact on aviation safety in the UK".

Launching the committee's report, Mrs Ellman said that currently the UK implemented stricter flight-time regulations than some other European countries, but under the new rules proposed by Easa the UK would not be able to have its own regime.

She said that under the existing UK regulations "43% of pilots have reported falling asleep involuntarily at some point while on duty ... and this shows how fatigue is already an issue in aviation".

The committee took evidence from consultant Mick Spencer, who wrote a report on the Easa proposals.

In its report, the committee said: "We share Mick Spencer's concern that 'the new regulations are setting a standard that accepts a higher level of fatigue more generally and, if not managed properly, that could well lead to a situation where the accident risk will increase'."

A Department for Transport spokeswoman said: "The safety of the travelling public is paramount, which is why we have been clear that we would only support Easa's final proposals if the CAA (Civil Aviation Authority) is content that they provide an appropriate level of protection against crew fatigue."

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