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Extended pilot flight hours are dangerous - pilots' union



New Flight Time Limitations (FTL) for pilots and cabin crew, just published by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) will jeopardise flight safety and have significant consequences for Europe's passengers, the Airline Pilots Association (ALPA) warned today.

"Despite repeated calls for safe and science-based FTL rules to prevent air crew fatigue from endangering flight safety, EASA and the EU Commission are opting for a text that addresses the airlines' commercial needs, but fails to protect passenger safety," the union said.

"By focussing on some marginal improvements compared to the current EU FTL rules, EASA deflects from the fact that its proposal will permit work schedules that will make pilots fly whilst being dangerously fatigued" the union quoted ECA President Nico Voorbach as saying.

"As safety professionals, pilots are duty bound not to operate when fatigued. It will be our responsibility to decline duties that are not safe."

ALPA said the EASA proposal disregards unanimous scientific advice and makes it legal for pilots to operate an aircraft and land after having been awake for more than 22 hours. The proposed new regulation will also allow:

- Extremely long hours awake at the moment of landing, after long standby and flight duties;
- Night flights of up to 12 hrs whilst scientists set the limit at 10 hrs;
- Evading stringent rules on flight schedules that disrupt sleep patterns (e.g. early starts);
- Putting crews on open-ended standby for many days without an ability to plan their sleep.

"Fatigue impairs the judgment and ability of air crews to react quickly – with potentially disastrous consequences, as demonstrated by recent accidents" said Philip von Schöppenthau,

ECA Secretary General. "We cannot wait for another accident before the EU wakes up and realises its rules are insufficient. We need safe rules now!"

The ECA and its Members Associations across Europe are calling on the EU Institutions to withdraw their support from this proposal without delay and to enact changes that protect the first and most basic passenger right: the right to a safe flight.