

Non-Routine Operations

BACKGROUND

The air transport industry faces a constant pressure to operate flights on time and in a safe and efficient manner. Under normal operations, pilots are trained to fly according to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). Most Aviation Authorities only stipulate that a flight needs to be conducted "in a safe manner under specifically prescribed rules and regulations". It is then the responsibility of the Operators, and in turn the pilots, to ensure that these rules and regulations are followed in every phase of flight. Many flights, however, are conducted outside the scope of normal operations. Such examples include, but are not limited to:

- Ferry flights with known technical defects
- Post maintenance flights
- Trial flights for procedures yet to be approved by Authorities
- Trial flights for new equipment

LACK OF TRAINING

Some Operators use a dedicated set of very experienced pilots to perform non-routine operations such as Type Inspection Authorisation (TIA) and Functional Check Flights (FCF). Many Operators, however, do not use these specifically trained pilots, and allow regular line pilots on these operations, provided the aircraft meets the relevant airworthiness requirements. Similarly, trial flights designed to test new airborne technology and check for bugs or operational constraints are often carried out on routine commercial flights by ordinary line pilots with little or no specific training.

POSITION

In order to mitigate the possible safety risks generated by non-routine operations, IFALPA believes that the following actions should be implemented:

- Only experienced crews should be assigned to flight operations expected to – or likely to – exceed normal parameters;
- Crews should always be notified of the exact state of the aircraft and any defects (or recurring defects) they may encounter for a period of time post maintenance;
- Specific training standards should be implemented so that pilots obtain the necessary experience in environments that would be considered 'non-normal' or 'non-routine'. This could be achieved by simulator sessions, observation flights, and/or crew pairing with pilots familiar with these operations;
- Dedicated, thorough pre-flight briefing should be carried out for flights involved in such operations. Guidance material should be available.
- Operators should identify hazards and assess all risks related to non-normal operations, considering the pilot's ability to conduct these operations without specific experience or familiarity with the particular flying environment and the presence of passengers onboard.
- The impact of non-routine operations on pilot workload, task sharing, and possibly stress and fatigue should not be underestimated.