

EASA has to choose, between what is right and what is easy.

As yet another very busy year draws to a close; I look back, take a deep breath and reflect upon what has happened this year and what lies ahead for 2011.

Although many items were discussed in Hamburg at this year's annual congress, most of the items related to what we had seen "action wise" from EASA and various NAA's around the world. In addition to the NAA's, there is of course, industry. With what is now quite clearly a failing standardization process coupled with a complete lack of meaningful enforcement of rules and regulation, industry has made the most of the opportunity to dumb down that the situation affords them.

EASA's Remit Is To Promote The Highest Common Standards Thereby Ensuring That EASA Become The Best Aviation Regulator In The World.

On the face of it a remit we should support. However stating this, it is important to consider **for whom** they want to be the best?

Is the goal to be best for industry by creating an environment where Industry can do as it pleases, set its own standards, and break its own rules all without repercussion? Should the remit allow for industry to cut costs to an extent which far exceeds sensible logic?

Or is the intent of EASA's remit to provide guidance on becoming the world's most responsible regulator with their resources trained firmly on what is best for European citizens. Shouldn't they be creating a system where the highest standards prevail, where Pilots receive the best training available to ensure safe flying? Where Aircraft Engineers receive the best training available to ensure they remain highly educated and skilled, fully prepared as trouble shooters making sure aircraft have been maintained to a known standard prior to departure. Where Air Traffic Controllers are provided with the best equipment to safely control our crowded European skies. Where airports are properly prepared and organised to be able to offer sufficient security without becoming too intrusive despite an ever increasing number of passengers.

In my view, it is the task of regulators such as EASA, on behalf of Governments, to ensure citizens are sufficiently safe, either when travelling as a passenger or when in the comfort of their own home. Unfortunately the evidence suggests the complete opposite. We are in fact experiencing the systematic failing of such authorities. Instead of solving problems or ensuring safety remains paramount by enforcing the "law", they succumb to an industry that is constantly whining about nothing other than costs. They claim that to be able to compete, they require even more flexibility from the regulator. One demand is to be able to leave the high standards behind that took a century of development and learning to evolve into something that both creates and promotes safe flight.

The current situation in aviation can most certainly be likened to the recent problems in the banking sector which almost led to a complete monetary meltdown on a global scale. Despite warnings that things were not right the banks continued to take unprecedented risks while financial sector regulators stood idly by doing nothing.

We have all suffered in some way the consequences of the global economic downturn that resulted.

We to in aviation are now at a similar crossroads. Warnings have been issued that cut backs and current practices have gone too far and safety has become compromised. Industry and industry regulators are not listening.

If this trend continues the consequences do not bear thinking about. Yet this is actually the direction European Aviation regulators are taking us.

The tragedy in all this is that we do on the whole, have good regulations already in place which are largely being ignored by industry as they complain that the regulations limits their operation and hampers their flexibility. Authorities no longer seek out non compliance with any purpose preferring instead to confirm that only the procedures are in compliance with the regulations rather than confirming that the procedure is actually adhered to.

Regulators have installed occurrence reporting systems to promote the reporting of safety issues or non compliance with the regulations. Thousands of reports come in from all over Europe about failures and unsafe operations but these are quite often filed away rather than acted upon. It is also common for regulators to conveniently look in the other direction as reporters of such non compliances are often dealt with by the airline internally or need to seek new employment.

Shooting the messenger should be a thing of the past as there are now laws in place which should protect the reporter. However when asking European Authorities or EASA whether they actively protect reporters by ensuring their job is not at risk the answer is; “we have removed their name from the report, that should be sufficient shouldn’t it?”.

They know only too well that in the aviation industry absolutely every action performed on an aircraft is documented and so it doesn’t require a whole lot of investigations skills to be able to easily uncover the reporter. Perhaps setting up an “AviLeaks” website might be the solution?

So finally I arrive back at my opening statement: As AEI Secretary General, I believe that it is up to EASA and particularly those who created it, the European Union, to ensure that their regulations are enforced and not undermined.

EASA and the various National Authorities have to choose, between what is right and what is easy before it’s too late.

Will they choose to do what is right? Nobody said it would be easy but ultimately it would be more rewarding knowing that you improved aviation safety, knowing that you made a difference,

or

Will they want to take the easy way out, appease industry by amending the regulations instead of enforcing them?

EASA put your money where your mouth is! Safety First is a way of life!

Fred Bruggeman
AEI Secretary General