

## **Brazil airline pilots flying international routes must retake English proficiency tests**



SAO PAULO (AP) - Nearly 40 Brazilian pilots who fly international routes must retake English proficiency tests on suspicions they are not fluent enough, Brazil's Civil Aeronautics Agency said Friday, raising questions about air travel safety.

The agency, known as ANAC, said 37 pilots obtained English proficiency certificates from Spain's Flight Crew Training Academy, with which it signed an agreement to administer the tests in late 2011. ANAC spokeswoman Karen Bonfim said Brazilian pilots no longer take the tests at the Spanish institution.

In May, ANAC conducted a study that showed the proficiency tests administered in Spain did not comply with the standards demanded by the United Nations' International Civil Aviation Organization, Bonfim said. Suspicions started emerging earlier this year after ANAC noticed "a higher than average number" of pilots going to Spain for their certificates after failing earlier tests administered by ANAC in Brazil.

A working knowledge of English is required for pilots flying internationally.

"Poor English-language proficiency has a pretty big implication because poor communications can endanger safety and lead to an accidents," said Kevin L. Hiatt, chief operating officer of the Virginia-based Flight Safety Foundation, an industry-supported group that promotes aviation safety worldwide.

Hiatt said that by understanding each other clearly a "situational awareness between pilot and air traffic controllers is created ensuring them that traffic is being controlled in order to keep everyone safe."

In having pilots retake their English proficiency tests, Brazil "acted in a very responsible and prudent manner to ensure the safety of flights," Hiatt added.

If by Dec. 15, the Brazilian pilots don't take and pass another English proficiency test administered by ANAC, they will not be allowed to fly international routes, Bonfim said.

She would not say what airlines the 37 pilots fly for.

Bonfim said the proficiency tests started being given in 2007. Since then 8,549 Brazilian pilots have been tested, mostly in Brazil, and 74 percent passed.