

Pilot training 'dangerously outdated', warns FSF chief Bill voss

THE influential Flight Safety Foundation has called for a revision of proposed US rules requiring commercial pilots to have at least 1500 hours of flight experience.

FSF chief executive Bill Voss warned a US senate sub-committee on aviation operations, safety and security against requirements that placed an undue focus on the quantity, rather than quality, of flight training.

The sub-committee was hearing evidence on the Airline Safety and Federal Aviation Administration Extension Act of 2010, also known as HR5900.

The independent, non-profit safety group acknowledges that training rules have been relatively static for decades and Mr Voss told the committee that changes in technology and industry restructuring had caused training requirements to become "dangerously outdated".

He said the problem was not unique to the US and the world would be watching how the FAA addressed it.

"Our position has been that if a flight crew needs to know, understand or have a specific skill set in order to protect the lives of their passengers, steps should be taken to ensure the knowledge is obtained through training or previous experience," he said.

"Mandating an arbitrary number of hours experience required to be in a cockpit makes the dangerous assumption that specific knowledge will be obtained simply due to hours in the air. This leaves too much to chance. "There are countless examples of pilots with many thousands of hours, who lacked the critical knowledge to avert a tragedy. "

The FSF boss cited an Air Florida crash in Washington, where experienced pilots lacked critical knowledge of cold weather and de-icing operations.

"While the purpose of a 1500-hour rule is understood, the Flight Safety Foundation strongly supports the notion that a structured training program can allow this requirement to be reduced, since that training program would reduce risk by leaving less to chance," he said.

"The foundation believes the real effectiveness of the new rule will be more a result of mandating critical training that targets risk in the real world, rather than simply increasing the number of hours."

Requirements that did make sense included the need for 50 hours multi-engine experience for a second-in-command and 1000 hours of airline operational experience for captains.

He said the latter amounted to one or two years of line flying as a first officer before assuming command and many responsible airlines had a similar requirement.

Mr Voss also raised concerns about the new rules on international carriers.

He said an FAA proposal to require an Airline Transport Pilot certificate for an airline second-in-command would have significant international implications that could affect the FAA's role as a regulatory standard-bearer.

"For the first time, the FAA will promulgate a rule that the rest of the world will have to universally dismiss," he said.

"Given the structure of the global airline industry and the demand for aviation professionals around the world, it will be impossible for foreign regulators to follow the FAA's lead and implement an ATP requirement for the second-in-command of an air carrier."

Mr Voss welcomed changes to fatigue rules, which he described as "historic" after 20 years of political gridlock.

"What we have today are a set of rules that reflect our modern understanding of fatigue and operational risks based on science rather than just political horse-trading," he said.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/aviation/pilot-training-dangerously-outdated-warns-fsf-chief-bill-voss/story-e6frg95x-1226325153411>