Fact Sheet
General Aviation Safety

One of the FAA’s top priorities is to reduce the number of fatal accidents in general aviation, just as we have worked to reduce fatal accidents in commercial aviation. Similar to commercial aviation, the FAA is focused on reducing general aviation accidents by using a non-regulatory, proactive strategy to get results. Our goal is to reduce the general aviation fatal accident rate per 100,000 flight hours by 10 percent over a 10-year period (2009-2018).

Over the next five years, the FAA will work with the general aviation community to improve safety by focusing on education and outreach. The FAA is already using critical data to identify risk in general aviation and develop safety strategies that will make a difference and help transform the safety culture.

Safety Standdown

Since 2006, the FAA Safety Team (http://www.faasafety.gov/), or “FAASTeam,” has been devoted to decreasing aircraft accidents by promoting a cultural change in the aviation community through education and training. Last year, the FAASTeam narrowed its focus to reducing general aviation accidents using teamwork, instruction in the use of safety management systems and risk management tools, and the development and distribution of educational materials.

Beginning in April, the FAA Safety Team is launching a safety standdown outreach effort to general aviation pilots and mechanics (www.FAASafety.gov/Standdown). A common practice in the military, a standdown focuses on education on a specific safety issue. More than 120 FAA staff plus approximately 3,000 volunteer safety representatives across the country will participate. The kick-off will be on April 2 in conjunction with the Sun’n Fun Fly-in and Expo in Lakeland, Fla. FAAST team members will also hold more than 98 standdown events across the country during April. The March/April issue of the FAA Safety Briefing features the standdown (http://www.faa.gov/news/safety_briefing/).
The four standdown topic areas are:

**Positive Flight Attitude**
Professionalism should characterize every action you take as a pilot. Approach every flight as if your life depends on it, because it does.

**Going Beyond Preflight**
A proper preflight is crucial. It’s more than using a checklist; a good preflight should test how well you know your aircraft and its systems.

**En Route Cruise**
Avoid complacency, stay ahead of the aircraft, plan for the unplanned, and always—always—maintain situational awareness.

**Maneuvering Flight**
Attention to airspeed is critical. Loss of control in maneuvering flight often results from inattention to airspeed.

The FAA Safety Team’s web site is a complete resource for pilots to help improve their skills and knowledge. The site hosts the FAA WINGS pilot proficiency program. It also contains online pilot training materials and includes courses to help a pilot avoid the pitfalls of VFR flight into Instrument Meteorological Conditions (IMC). Three of them are FAA-designed courses and four are industry courses. Two of the industry courses have costs associated with them while the other five are free. Pilots can register online and receive notification about safety seminars held in their area/airport/region. Many of these cover VFR into IMC as this is well-recognized as a safety issue.

**Other Five-Year Plan Initiatives**

**Amateur-Built Airplanes.** The FAA is seeing a troubling trend involving amateur-built (or experimental) aircraft, most of which are flown for personal use. For the past five years, amateur-built and other experimental aircraft were involved in 22 percent of U.S. fatal general aviation accidents, they account for a bit more than five percent of total general aviation fleet hours. This represents a nearly five-to-one ratio of fatal accidents per flight hour compared to the mainstream general aviation community. The FAA is finalizing an Advisory Circular (AC) based on recommendations from the Amateur-Built Flight Standardization Board. The AC will provide guidance and training experience recommendations to owners, pilots and flight instructors who fly experimental airplanes.

**Certificated Flight Instructors.** The FAA has been working with the flight instructor community to improve general aviation safety through improved flight instructor training, most notably recurrent training. In December 2010, the FAA met with industry sponsors of Flight Instructor Refresher Clinics (FIRC) and drafted an AC that will include industry’s input on improving FIRC’s. The AC is out for industry and public review.
Aviation Universities and Experts. Working through the Aviation Accreditation Board International (AABI) and the University Aviation Association (UAA), the FAA is partnering with the aviation academic community to leverage their expertise and develop best practices for improving flight training. As a first step, the FAA and AABI are co-chairing an FAA/Academia Symposium in conjunction with AABI’s July 2011 Industry-Educator Forum. Results will be presented at the October 2011 UAA Fall Education Conference and at the February 2012 AABI Winter Meeting. These meetings will provide a springboard for identifying specific non-regulatory measures that can be used to improve flight training and reduce accidents.

Data Analysis
Formed in the mid-1990s, the GA Joint Steering Committee (GAJSC) now has a renewed effort underway to combat general aviation fatal accidents. The GAJSC uses a streamlined Commercial Aviation Safety Team (CAST) model, a data-driven, consensus-based approach to analyze safety data to develop specific interventions that will mitigate the root causes of accidents.

The GAJSC is a primary mechanism for government/industry cooperation, communication, and coordination on general aviation safety issues. Among the group’s achievements are several Web-based resource guides, including the General Aviation Pilot’s Guide to Preflight Weather Planning, Weather Self-Briefings, and Weather Decision Making, which provides advice to pilots on how to make safe weather flying decisions. The committee is currently entering a new phase focused on using data analysis to develop interventions.

The GAJSC combines the expertise of many key decision makers across different parts of FAA, various government agencies, and several GA associations. FAA players include the Air Traffic Organization, Flight Standards Service, Aircraft Certification Service, and the Office of Airports. The other federal agencies are NASA, National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), and the National Weather Service. Industry participants include Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA), General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA), Helicopter Association International (HAI), National Business Aviation Association (NBAA), National Air Transportation Association (NATA), and others.

Background

The General Aviation Accident Rate
While the number of fatal general aviation accidents over the last decade has gone down, so have the flight hours due to the spike in fuel prices and the economic downturn. We’ve made some progress, but we need to do more.
The FAA has focused on pilot education and awareness. Also, better technology has given pilots more safety tools. Over the past three years, fatal accidents from Controlled Flight Into Terrain (CFIT) have dropped by more than 50 percent compared to the previous three years. Those involving loss of control in flight and approach and landing are down 20 to 25 percent. Meanwhile, fatal accidents in weather have decreased by nearly 40 percent in the past three years, and those that occur at night are down by about 25 percent.

However, the general aviation accident rate for 2010 was 1.14 accidents per 100,000 hours flown, including 268 fatal accidents with 457 fatalities. These accidents were down eight percent from fiscal year 2009. Over the past several years, the general aviation accident rate has remained static. Significant work is needed to further improve the general aviation safety record.

**The Top 10 Leading Causes of General Aviation Accidents**
Below are the top ten leading causes of fatal general aviation accidents in 2008 and 2009 (Part 91 and Part 135-unscheduled). These are the top causes identified as the "defining event" by the NTSB.

1. Loss of Control in flight while maneuvering: 26
2. Loss of Control in flight during initial climb: 21
3. Aerodynamic stall or spin while maneuvering during low altitude flying: 12
4. Low altitude operation or event while maneuvering during low altitude flying: 10
5. Controlled Flight into Terrain/object (CFIT) during enroute cruise: 8
6. Aerodynamic stall or spin during initial climb: 8
7. Visual Flight Rules (VFR) encounter with IMC during enroute: 7
8. Loss of Control in flight during enroute cruise: 7
9. Loss of Control in flight while maneuvering during low altitude flying: 7
10. Collision with terrain or an object (non-CFIT) while maneuvering during low altitude flying: 7

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