



# ARE YOU PREPARED TO BE SAFAED?

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Imagine a bright sunny morning at a European airport. Flight preparations and the loading of the aircraft are completed. Just about ready to go, when two gentlemen approach your aircraft and address the pilot: “Good morning, we are representatives from the local competent authority and are conducting a SAFA inspection. Please show us...”. You may have heard of SAFA, but are you prepared for what is happening? Are you aware that you may not be going anywhere at all?

SAFA is the acronym for the Safety Assessment of Foreign Aircraft program, established by the European Commission. It is a program created for the inspection of aircraft from third-countries operating in European airspace and landing in Europe.

## PRUDENCE

Be prepared for a ramp inspection if you are operating in Europe from a third-country.

During a ramp inspection, given the limited time, inspectors will primarily focus on crew and aircraft documentation and the physical condition of the aircraft. But they will also observe how a crew solves its normal and abnormal



tasks (including dealing with this surprise inspection) on the ground. From the assessment of the displayed level of professionalism and the procedural discipline, they will draw conclusions as to whether an operator is to be trusted as a safe partner in the skies. And yes, they have the authority to delay the departure of the aircraft until any issues they find that, in their opinion, "have a major influence on safety" have been corrected. Worst case, they can withdraw the Certificate if Airworthiness.

### Safety Assessment of Aircraft

The State is responsible for the safety of aircraft registered in their registry. States have the obligation of overseeing these aircraft. For a Civil Aviation Authority in such a State, this oversight approach works from the top to down. The State registers an aircraft and then oversees its operation and safety by various statutory means, such as airworthiness reviews, pilot licensing and operations inspections performed in its own territory.

However, in the last 30 years, commercial regulations in airlines and charter companies have changed drastically. Liberalization and deregulation of markets offered flexibility but also created a situation in which aircraft are operated globally without ever returning home where the competent authority may execute its oversight responsibility (this assumes it would do it in the first place).

The consequences of deregulation and liberalization in aviation made it necessary to rethink the role of the State. The Safety Assessment of Foreign Aircraft (SAFA) Program was initiated as a consequence. ECAC initially sponsored the initiative, managed by the JAA. Granted, SAFA would probably not have prevented the Birgenair Flight 301 accident from happening, but SAFA started changing the awareness of Operators that safety was a constant effort and States were not looking away.

Take, for example, an accident occurring on the night of January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2004. The Flash Airlines Flight 604 Boeing 737-300 crashed south of Sharm-el-Sheikh in the Red Sea. Most of the passengers were French tourists returning home from the popular vacation destination. The flight was cleared for an initial climbing left turn after take-off and

the crew had already initiated the left turn when the autopilot was engaged. A few seconds later the autopilot disengaged and the aircraft commenced a slow roll to the right. CVR data indicate an increasing state of confusion of the captain, and the FDR recorded aileron deflections, which resulted in an excessive right bank angle. The aircraft continually lost altitude and crashed into the Red Sea some two and a half minutes after take-off, killing all 142 passengers and 6 crew members. The final investigation report by the Egyptian Ministry of Civil Aviation cited four possible causes, all related to technical problems; however, "no conclusive evidence could be found". The report's conclusions were highly contested, with the French Bureau d'Enquêtes et d'Analyses (BEA) and the US NTSB placing more emphasis on the human factor aspects of the accident sequence.

This very same aircraft had been subject of a SAFA inspection in Switzerland in 2002. As a result of the significant SAFA findings, the Swiss competent authority had banned the airplane and its sister airplane from landing in and overflying Switzerland. However, international exchange of SAFA findings between participating States did not automatically trigger a ban in other SAFA States. The Swiss informed States to which Flash Airlines was operating about the serious findings and the Swiss ban, but these States continued allowing operations by Flash Airlines. After this accident the European Commission understood it was important to create common rules on this topic and adopted Directive 2004/36/EC on the safety of third-country aircraft using Community airports. Thereafter, this legislation matured further and additional technical rules were adopted. For example, Regulation (EC) No 2111/2005 provides a provision for a decision making process whereby an airline may be banned from European airspace for safety reasons. Those airlines will then appear on a "Community list", commonly referred to as the "Black List" ([http://ec.europa.eu/transport/airban/list\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/transport/airban/list_en.htm)).

SAFA is a spot examination of the operative state of an aircraft and its crew. It is not a cure-all solution for substandard safety performance, but it has proven to raise awareness among aircraft operators considering the con-

sequences they may face in case they "get caught". Unsafe attitudes and behavior are often identified and highlighted by ramp inspectors. Even if the findings are not dramatic (yet?), the fact that an inspector starts asking questions may serve as a trigger for change. And not seldom has SAFA most probably stopped the proverbial "accident waiting to happen" from taking off again.

### Be Prepared

Robert Baden-Powell's motto is equally applicable to millions of Scouts as it is to foreign aircraft operators subject to unannounced SAFA inspections when flying to European airports. Specific items the SAFA team will review may include licences of the pilots, procedures and manuals that should be carried in the cockpit, compliance with these procedures by flight and cabin crew, safety equipment in cockpit and cabin, cargo carried in the aircraft, and the technical condition of the aircraft.

More guidance and information may be found on the EASA website at <http://easa.europa.eu/approvals-and-standardisation/safety-assessment-of-foreign-aircraft-SAFA.php>. Note that the NBAA 2010 Convention in Atlanta will also feature two presentations on the European SAFA Program.

Having all your ducks in a row by consistently upholding a high level of compliance and professionalism and by fostering a healthy safety culture you will be able to quickly convince the SAFA inspectors of the safety of your aircraft, so that you can be off on your flight into the sunny day.



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