

Max Trescott - SJ Flight

From: Max Trescott - SJ Flight [info@sjflight.com]
Sent: Thursday, August 04, 2005 10:36 PM
To: 'marion.blakey@faa.gov'
Cc: 'david.mandell@faa.gov'
Subject: Follow-up on our Oshkosh discussion on Regional Accident Analysis

3405 Ridgemont Dr.
Mountain View, CA 94040
August 4, 2005

The Honorable Marion C. Blakey
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Ms. Blakey:

It was truly a pleasure to meet you briefly after the Master CFI breakfast at AirVenture 2005 in Oshkosh last week. Thank you for taking a few minutes to talk with me regarding my research and article on Regional Accident Analysis, which can be found at <http://www.avweb.com/news/safety/189630-1.html>.

As I mentioned then, my research into ten years of fatal accident data for the San Francisco Bay Area showed that the causes of fatal general aviation accidents in this region are remarkably different from fatal accidents causes in the rest of the country. For example, while night is a condition for 21% of fatal accidents in the U.S., it's a condition for 44% of all fatal accidents that occur on flights to and from the Bay Area and for 55% of the fatal accidents that actually occur in the Bay Area. VFR-into-IMC is a factor in 33% of S.F. Bay Area accidents vs. only 5% of U.S. accidents. Unfortunately, no organizations are communicating information about these unique risk factors to our local airmen, so they continue to be at risk.

Given the large differences in accidents causes in this region, it's reasonable to assume that other regions also have variability in their accident causes. If these differences do exist and the unique accident factors for each region are effectively communicated to local CFI's and airmen, there should be a significant reduction in general aviation fatalities, which I know is one of your major goals.

The key challenge in implementing regional accident analysis will be the definition of the regions. In my analysis, I chose boundaries that roughly corresponded with the mountain ranges that surround San Francisco approximately 20 miles to the north, 50 miles to the east and 60 miles to the south. On a national basis, I'd suggest that you identify regions based upon major differences in weather, topology or other relevant factors.

I understand that the agency is beginning accident analysis within each of nine newly defined regions. Unless these regions were selected based upon common topology or weather, it's unlikely that all differences will be uncovered. For example, while half of all fatal accidents in S.F occur at night, the L.A. region appears to have a night fatal accident rate that is virtually identical to the rest of the U.S. Hence, the local difference in night fatalities would probably be obscured in an analysis conducted for a larger region that combines S.F. with the relatively flat Central Valley or the L.A. basin.

Another key challenge is extracting and cleaning the data, which varies somewhat across different databases. I easily spent a couple of hundred hours last year gathering and analyzing the data for our local region. Nationally, gathering and analyzing the data could be a fulltime job for a small, dedicated team. It may be unreasonable to expect agency personnel to perform this kind of analysis as an adjunct to their other duties.

On a related note, I'd to suggest that the agency increase its effort in educating airmen on the dangers of night flight. The number of fatal night accidents is out of proportion to the few hours general aviation pilots fly at night. Also, the probability of an accident being fatal jumps from 14% in the daytime to 36% at night. At my Night Flying presentation at Oshkosh, fewer than 20% of the 160 pilots attending raised their hands when I asked if their CFI's had ever told them of the greater dangers posed by night flying. While the agency has many excellent Accident Prevention Brochures, there isn't one for night flying and I'd like to suggest that one be created.

In summary, I'd like to urge you to make regional accident analysis a high priority and that the regions be defined based upon factors that affect accident causality. I'm confident that airmen will be more interested in learning about their own unique local risks and that communicating this information to them will have an impact upon the number of G.A. fatalities. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance to you in any way.

best regards,
Max Trescott, Master CFI
650-224-7124

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