

ESAM Statements concerning aircrew fatigue and fatigue-related safety risks

date: 19 October 2011

1. Due to economic pressure, requiring maximal aircraft and aircrew utilization, aircrew is increasingly confronted with irregular duties, long flight duty periods, early starts, late arrivals, night flying, and circadian disruption.
2. This may lead to impaired sleep and cumulative sleep debt, lowered alertness, and fatigue, which may affect flight safety and health.
3. Within the existing flight time limitations it may be possible to construct schedules where a combination of factors gives rise to high levels of fatigue, discontented aircrew, and/or high sick leave rates.
4. Aircrew fatigue should be prevented as much as practically possible (ALARP principle).
5. The fact that no accidents attributable to fatigue have occurred within an airline should not be used as evidence that the fatigue-related safety risk is acceptable or that the operations are optimally safe.
6. Instead, airlines should adopt a ‘just’ cultureⁱ in which fatigue reports of aircrew should be used to identify and analyze unacceptably fatiguing rotations and take appropriate action in order to reduce the safety risk.
7. ESAM recommends implementing Fatigue Risk Management Systems in combination with Basic Flight and Duty Time Rules, based on scientific evidence and best operational practice.

ⁱ Definition of a Just Culture: ‘Individuals are not punished for actions, omissions or decisions taken by them that are commensurate with their experience and training but which result in a reportable event; but gross negligence, wilful violations and destructive acts are not tolerated’ (source Civil Aviation Authority, UK).