THE VIEW FROM WASHINGTON

BY RIC PERI
VICE PRESIDENT, AEA GOVERNMENT & INDUSTRY AFFAIRS

United States, European Union Sign Bilateral Aviation Safety Agreement

After delay of its acceptance, in part because of the revised fees and charges schedule the European Commission published last year, the United States and the European Union signed the Bilateral Aviation Safety Agreement (BASA) on June 30, 2008.

The agreement was signed in Brussels by Mirko Komac, director general of the Slovenian Civil Aviation Authority representing the EU presidency; Antonio Tajani, vice president in charge of transport for the European Commission, and Robert A. Sturgell, acting administrator for the FAA. The agreement's entry into force is subject to ratification by both sides.

The BASA is an aviation agreement to improve safety and cut costs. Because of the mutual recognition of aviation safety certificates, the agreement will result in better harmonized safety systems on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as less cumbersome technical and administrative procedures for the recognition of certificates.

The agreement enables the reciprocal acceptance of certificates issued by the European Aviation Safety Agency and the Federal Aviation Administration.

The purpose of the agreement is:

• To allow the reciprocal acceptance of approvals and findings of compliance issued by the two aviation authorities.

• Ensure the continuation of high-level regulatory cooperation.

• Promote a high degree of safety in air transport.

Its scope covers the airworthiness approvals and monitoring of civil aeronautical products; environmental testing and approvals; and the approvals and monitoring of maintenance facilities. It is expected for the agreement to further improve the movement of aviation products across the Atlantic.

Currently, the AEA is reviewing the Bilateral Aviation Safety Agreement to help its membership comply with and take advantage of the provisions in this agreement.

International Aviation Safety Conference

The world aviation authorities meet once each year during the International Aviation Safety Conference to discuss pressing issues in the aviation industry. This year, the primary topic was SMS: safety management systems.

The conference began 25 years ago as the Harmonization Meeting between the Joint Aviation Authorities and the Federal Aviation Administration with participation from Transport Canada as well as many of the individual authorities of Europe. With the harmonization of Part 25/CS-25 nearly completed and the transition from the JAA to the European Aviation Safety Agency, the meeting lost its "harmonization" title and now has became the International Aviation Safety Conference.

Authorities from 34 countries attended this year's conference in St. Petersburg, Fla., which the FAA hosted. Each year, the conference host alternates between EASA (JAA in the early years) and the FAA — the FAA in even years; EASA in odd years.

This year's meeting highlighted a number of issues of importance to AEA member companies and demonstrated the global reach of aviation. The most profound concept of the conference was the simplest: risk management.

Have we identified the risk in our workplace? What have we done to minimize this risk?

It is interesting to listen to the latest buzzwords surrounding safety: human factors, fatigue management, system safety, SMS. They all deal with the same root cause: risk management.

As the conference progressed for three days in June, I asked myself: Where in the avionics industry is there risk?

Most of the calls I receive from members are about paperwork and making sure the paperwork is correct. Seldom have we had much of a safety-of-flight issue. But risk isn't just about safety of flight; it is also about:

• Occupational safety to reduce the risk of injury to the employees.

• Environmental management to reduce the risk of contamination of the air, ground and water.

• Safe ground operations to limit the risk while working on the ramp and in the hangar.

I remember as a new mechanic (before the popularity of the term "techni-

cian"), I had a boss who was a stickler for cleanliness — the job wasn't done until the area was cleaned up afterward. He was so committed to cleanliness, it wasn't unusual to see him walking across the hangar, then stopping to pick up a stray piece of safety wire. He set such a high standard by his example, we all just cleaned up after the job as though it was the last step in the maintenance tasks.

Our industry needs to approach risk management the same way we approach other performance issues. It isn't enough to "talk the talk;" we need to step up to the plate and "walk the walk." We need to set the example by our performance in every aspect of risk management.

Look around your shop. What practices do you have in place to set a high standard of performance? Conversely, what practices have you put in place encouraging someone to cut corners? Are you a stickler for paperwork? Parts management? Cleanliness? Organization? Are you myopically focused in one area and ignoring another?

When an incident occurs — perhaps something simple, such as tripping over a powercord — does is cause you to stop and look around to find and correct all other tripping hazards?

When the customer points out a paperwork error, does it cause you to pause and reevaluate all other paperwork you might be doing wrong?

How do you address competing risks — such the risk of being late on a project and the risk of cutting corners?

Do you forget to praise your technicians for doing their jobs correctly day-in and day-out, but chastise them when a project isn't done on time and the customer is waiting?

The first time management cuts corners to meet a deadline, it telegraphs to the entire maintenance workforce that cutting corners is OK. All of the hangar-wall slogans won't make up for an implied philosophy that the price for being late is greater than the likelihood of getting caught cutting corners. This sets a new organization norm.

The idea is, the aviation industry needs to view risk management from all levels and take a position to minimize risk — all risk.

During the International Aviation Safety Conference, another common message rang clear: creating a harmonized SMS standard, which could be a double-edged sword. On one hand, standardization allows for the cross-border flow of aviation commerce. On the other hand, it is challenged by protections the elected officials and the commerce laws of the respective countries provide.

While the Civil Aviation Authorities would like to harmonize the rules and publish identical regulations, the rule-making requirements and limitations of the authorities could make total harmonization simply impossible. However, it must be evaluated and harmonized to the greatest extent possible.

The conference this year might not have been as productive as the former "harmonization" meeting where everyone rolled up their sleeves and took up the challenge of harmonization, but the conference clearly was an "international aviation safety" meeting. The topics were relevant and timely, and they represented opinions of the various aviation authorities worldwide. ❑

If you have comments or questions about this article, send e-mails to avionicsnews@aea.net.