



# THE VIEW FROM WASHINGTON

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## Aviation Authorities Should Build Upon Industry's 'Best Practices' Worldwide

In the late 1920s, at the urging of aviation industry leaders who believed the airplane could not reach its full commercial potential without federal action to improve and maintain safety standards, President Calvin Coolidge appointed a board to investigate the issue. The board's report favored federal safety regulation. To that end, the Air Commerce Act became law on May 20, 1926.

Two other important events include:

- The British Parliament establishing the Department of Civil Aviation on Feb. 12, 1919.
- The aviation community agreeing to the Convention on International Civil Aviation, which established the International Civil Aviation Organization, on Dec. 7, 1944.

What do these three events in aviation history have in common? They each began by adopting industry "best practices" as the foundation of the aviation regulations we build upon today.

Why is this important? As we move toward a time of industry-wide safety management systems, building upon a proven process of evaluating and adopting industry's "best practices" is critically important.

The current failure of most aviation authorities today is the loss of historical perspective. They have lost their way. They fail to realize they are regulating the noncompliant to bring them in line with the best the industry has to

offer. There is very little need for new wholesale programs.

Awareness of this issue has been raised recently through three events impacting AEA membership:

- The first is the complete rewrite of the regulatory structure of the Australian Civil Aviation regulations.

In the process of participation with the rulemaking activities Down Under, the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) chose a complete rewrite of its maintenance and certification regulations for better understanding and recognition in a global aviation marketplace — a completely admirable goal.

The challenge was: What actually is the international standard?

On Dec. 7, 1944, the aviation community agreed to establish and maintain "world best practices" for aviation. This agreement is commonly referred to as the Convention on International Civil Aviation, or the Chicago Convention. Today, we refer to the organization established by the Chicago Convention and chartered to maintain world aviation "best practices" as the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

The Australian government is a signatory to the Convention on International Civil Aviation; it is a signatory to ICAO.

While expediting its efforts toward an upgraded regulatory system, the Australian authorities simply failed to perform a basic gap analysis between

what it has (its current Civil Aviation Safety Regulations) and what it needs (the international "best practices" of ICAO) to determine what deficiencies actually exist.

As AEA members know from our work in implementing required training programs, a basic gap analysis compares what we need to what we have, then we define the difference, which allows us to focus our efforts on correcting the deficiency. A basic concept in all of aircraft maintenance: What is the desired performance of the component? How is it performing? What do I need to do to make it perform properly?

CASA is not alone here. Throughout the industry, I see a complete breakdown in the basics. We are not focused on the desired outcome. We don't acknowledge the 80-plus years of regulatory compliance. We don't clearly identify the deficiency we are trying to correct.

We also don't take the time to understand what it is we are trying to accomplish. What is the regulation, the policy, the guidance or the maintenance requirement with which we are trying to comply? Clearly identifying the problem is the first, and most important, step in finding a reasonable, cost-effective solution.

This axiom is the basis for all problem-solving — whether it's finding a cost-effective training solution to meet regulatory requirements, or solving an in-flight deficiency, or complying the

mandate of a government agent.

An example of the problem the industry is facing surfaced recently with an FAA activity looking at corrections and upgrades to Part 147. While it is just another Part 147 working group (I think there has been at least one in effect continuously for the past 10 years), it has not focused on a problem statement; therefore, it will not be able to “fix” the problem. The discrepancy: “It (Part 147) doesn’t work as well as we would like.”

The recommendations to tune up Part 147 are across the spectrum. However, because no one has diagnosed a problem, performed a gap analysis to the “best practices” set by ICAO, or looked at the limitations of the standard, the likelihood this working group will be any more successful than previous groups is pretty low.

- The second issue to suggest a new wholesale program is the implementation of repair station training programs worldwide.

It appears the authors of the training program requirements didn’t bother to look at successful aviation businesses to determine what makes them so successful, then mimic those traits in the rule. They just went in with a clean sheet of paper and drafted a “new” requirement.

They looked at the requirements for different sectors. They brought in the requirements from different industries. And they brought in their special interests. What they didn’t bring was a clear description of the problem statement or what the best in the industry already are doing to be a step above the rest.

While I don’t have data to support this claim, it is my observation that AEA member shops have some of the highest participation in industry training events compared to other aviation trade associations. As such, the AEA represents the best the industry has

to offer. Therefore, when looking at implementing training requirements, we don’t need to add a new program. We might need to add a bit to what we currently are doing, but in no case should we be required to do something completely new.

Instead, we should perform a basic gap analysis: What training is required? What training are we getting currently? What AEA resources are you using currently? What is the difference? How can you best correct the deficiency?

- The third issue in new wholesale programs are proposals worldwide to implement safety management systems (SMS).

Recently, I attended a European Aviation Safety Agency meeting and, for the first time, I actually heard someone from an aviation authority discuss the need to perform a gap analysis before implementing an SMS requirement for maintenance because most of the requirements already exist in current maintenance regulations.

The authorities citing ICAO as the basis for new SMS mandate fail to note ICAO has simply adopted industry’s “best practices.” It has not “created” this new requirement, but rather evaluated the concept and adopted it as a basis to make all of aviation functions better by mimicking the best the industry has to offer. However, the ICAO mandate starts by instructing the authorities to adopt the concepts of SMS throughout their aviation industry, including themselves.

The first step to implementing SMS is to acknowledge, after some 80 years of aviation safety regulations, many of the ICAO member states have very good programs. Acknowledge what you do. Defend how very good you are already. Perform a gap analysis, then determine how to tune-up the current regulatory systems.

There is no room for open criticism

of the truly safe and efficient aviation industry we have. We shouldn’t be afraid of promoting our success. Are there companies making minor adjustments to their structures and producing better products? Sure. Is there something we can learn from these progressive businesses? Definitely. Should we embrace continuous improvement? Of course. Is our industry broken? Absolutely not.

The membership of the AEA represents nearly one quarter of all FAA repair stations worldwide. In addition, the AEA represents between 60 and 80 percent of the approved maintenance organizations in the developed countries where the AEA has a strong presence. In essence, AEA membership represents the best practices of the avionics community.

As an organization, the AEA has learned the lessons through failures and through successes. One of the basic concepts of the AEA’s continuous improvement is communicating its failures and its successes. The AEA evaluates the failures, then determines how they can be eliminated or at least minimized.

Through the communications mediums of the AEA (*Avionics News*, AEA Regulatory Updates, AEA regional meetings and the AEA annual convention), we all can learn the “best practices” this industry has to offer.

For members actively participating in the AEA, the changes mandated by new regulations are minor adjustments to your already well-run businesses. As an association, the AEA has a wonderful opportunity to reduce accidents and incidents, reduce violations of regulations, and improve industry performance.

Within its membership, the AEA holds the best of the best. Let us all participate in an industry-wide, continuous improvement process — without new regulatory mandate. □