MARCH 20, 2019

Update on Recent Issues Related to Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 and Lion Air Flight 610

There are many issues being discussed in various public forums related to the Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 and Lion Air Flight 610 accidents; we are going to cover several of these in this Blast. The Pilots of SWAPA know, no matter the distractions, we must continue to maintain our focus and the underlying premise of what we do every day: fly from A to B safely, or not at all. We know that if the automation/technology is not doing what we need and want it to do, then we disconnect it and fly the jet.

Before we get into specific topics, let's discuss how SWAPA Pilots serve as the last line of defense and as an independent and impartial advocate for our passengers. We spend years gaining the experience and knowledge that keep us safe, and we retain and transfer that knowledge through various ways to build our own "data" base.

Your SWAPA Safety Committee is an equal partner in our ASAP and FDAP programs. They have and will continue to monitor those programs for any items of concern and are especially on the lookout for any MAX issues.

Your Training and Standards Committee is intimately involved in the evaluation of MAX issues and with the redesign of MAX training and procedures.

SWAPA Government Affairs is active on Capitol Hill answering questions and providing briefings and subject matter experts to members of Congress so they have complete information to make their decisions. SWAPA will be on Capitol Hill when hearings start next week.

Our Communications Department is working with the media to get out the facts we know, help correct bad information when it is published or taken out of context, and to provide expert sources when requested. We will continue to use these and other assets of SWAPA to keep our passengers, our crews, and the public safe. Safety is not only about being safe in the present state; it is our never-ending mission to be safer in the future.

Now let's address some specifics. Boeing is continuing development and testing of a software update and enhancement of issues related to MCAS. SWAPA is working with Southwest, Boeing, other Pilot unions and the FAA to test and validate this software.

Boeing will add redundancy and other limits to MCAS. In the future, both AOA sensors will be compared instead of one to determine if MCAS should activate; there will no longer be a single point of failure. Also, MCAS will no longer act repeatedly for a single MCAS triggered event. We still would like to have more detail on the development, control parameters and testing done on the algorithm that will trigger an MCAS event and we look forward to working with Boeing, operators and our counterparts.

These MCAS changes will require additional training. Flight Ops and SWAPA previewed the Boeing proposed computer-based training (CBT), which will require a test at the conclusion. The FAA will not allow this part of the training to be altered.

You will be required to complete this CBT before you fly the MAX and you will be paid in accordance with the CBA, which based on additional training and information SWA will include, will pay a minimum of .75 TFP. Other contractual details are being worked out at present and both parties
expect no major problems as long as the SWA Labor Relations does not interfere.

Both SWAPA and Flight Ops strongly feel the need to enhance the upcoming FAA-mandated training with additional information. Our two groups are working hand-in-hand on this and with total cooperation and transparency from both Flight Ops and SWAPA. This ongoing joint effort will encompass training in Read Before Fly, Crew Information Bulletins, etc.

SWAPA highly recommends that the Runaway Stabilizer checklist should, once again, be an immediate action/memory item. Flight Ops is evaluating our recommendation.

The certification process of the MAX is and should be under increased scrutiny. The U.S. Department of Transportation Inspector General’s office, in conjunction with the U.S. Justice Department, is conducting both audits and a criminal investigation. There are also ongoing questions about FAA funding, budgeting, staffing and oversight of Boeing. Questions about increased digitization of an existing aircraft should be examined. Also, a review of simulator development and implementation should be required based on the development of a new aircraft versus changes and modifications to an existing aircraft. This may be further complicated and scrutinized, internally and externally, due to yesterday’s nomination of a new permanent FAA administrator.

It is still very disturbing to us that Boeing did not disclose MCAS to the operators and Pilots and Boeing’s statement that “we did not need to know about it.” This methodology should and will be examined. The debate over whether it is a true new system or new logic affecting the way current systems operate is not relevant to the fact that MCAS changes the way the MAX functions and operates in certain circumstances.

Our knowledge and understanding of MCAS since Boeing’s disclosure, along with data feeds from Southwest aircraft, the addition of AOA displays in the MAX, our regular training and now our Extended Envelope Training (EET), have kept us safe up to the present. Now, we must gain new knowledge and understand and apply the forthcoming changes to MCAS, once approved, in order for us to maintain an even greater degree of safety.

Southwest will receive its first MAX simulator this July and Flight Ops tells us it should be certificated and ready for use by approximately October. Also, in October two additional MAX sims will be delivered and then three more will be delivered in January 2021.

Bloomberg News reported on March 12 that Ethiopian Airlines MAX Pilots got additional training on the MAX from Boeing after the Lion Air accident. SWAPA has not received any detailed information of what that training consisted of and whether it dealt with MCAS.

There has also been widespread speculation on the flap retraction altitude on Ethiopian 302. We do not know when that occurred. Please be aware, different airlines can use different flap retraction procedures and altitudes than we use.

The next few weeks will be very dynamic. As more data and information on Ethiopian Airlines flight 302 become available, there may need to be variations in the timeline for when the MAX is cleared to fly due to a variety of issues, including Congressional hearings next week and continued geopolitics. Take care of our passengers, crew, and each other.

Continue to do what you do so very well. Fly the jet.

Jon