NBAA RISK ASSESSMENT RESOURCE

Results of 2015 NBAA Business Aviation Leadership Safety Survey

Nov. 9, 2015

Earlier this year, the newly formed Risk Assessment Team of the NBAA Safety Committee developed a 27-question survey to gather opinions and perspectives from business aviation leaders about key safety issues within their operations. The online survey was deployed through multiple NBAA information channels and received a strong response from 367 members. The results were used to inform and support the Safety Committee's annual risk assessment process, which guides the creation of the committee's annual list of Top Safety Focus Areas (www.nbaa.org/safety-focus) and other resources.

A diverse group of business aviation stakeholders were invited to respond to the 2015 survey, including directors of aviation, safety directors/managers, chief and line pilots, directors of maintenance and more. People in flight department leadership roles were particularly well represented. Questions were developed around the following subject areas: general safety outlook, safety practices, safety reporting, threat perceptions, incidents and close calls, personal electronic devices (PEDs) and safety concerns.

The most typical operations flown by the majority of respondents were corporate (84 percent), and the aircraft types flown by respondent organizations were turbojet (68 percent), turboprop (14 percent), turbine helicopter (9 percent), piston fixed-wing (8 percent) and piston helicopter (1 percent).

As a whole, the 2015 survey found that 81 percent of respondents rated the safety culture in their flight organizations as excellent (28 percent) or very good (53 percent). However, survey analysis also identified several top areas of concern for business aviation leaders that will be useful to operators in evaluating their own safety cultures.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The intent of the survey authors had been to obtain responses from across the spectrum of business aviation, but the demographic data collected from respondents indicated that larger and more complex flight operations were well represented, while smaller and single-pilot operations were likely under-represented in the survey results.

Following the survey, analysis by the Safety Committee's Risk Assessment Team identified several key takeaways:

High Interest in Business Aviation Safety – The strong response to the 2015 survey indicates a strong, intrinsic motivation to discuss safety in business aviation. The fact that about 300 of the respondents answered all questions serves as a secondary indicator of the high level of interest and commitment respondents had in being part of the safety dialogue in their industry.

Fatigue the Most Frequently Named Safety Risk – The issue raised most frequently when respondents were asked an open-ended question seeking the top three safety risks confronting their operation was fatigue. Respondents also were asked to rank a list of potential human factors issues from most to least likely to trigger a mishap in their operation, and fatigue, illness or other physiological impairment scored second on that ranking, behind distraction. These responses imply that sensible and effective fatigue-risk mitigations for business aviation operators are a persistent and ongoing need that is strongly perceived by flight department managers.

More Data Sharing and Safety Collaboration Needed – In a section that explored safety practices, responses indicate there is still much work needed to inspire data sharing and safety collaboration among business aviation operators. For example, two thirds of respondents indicated they do not yet employ flight-data monitoring or participate in an information-sharing program. Only about half said they participate in safety outreach/collaboration (e.g., roundtables or regional business aviation associations).

Those results are made more troubling when considering that smaller operations are under-represented in the respondent pool to this survey. The reality on the state of information sharing is likely bleaker than these results imply, for that reason.

Risk of Aircraft Damage During Ground Operations a Concern– Business aviation leaders taking the survey indicated they are considerably concerned with the risk of aircraft damage during ground handling and servicing. This concern scored highest on a "rate activity most likely to cause an accident" question; second highest when asked what mishap risks are of highest need for active mitigation; and highest in number or respondents recalling an incident/close call in the last two years. It is likely respondents have seen the negative impact of this happening to an aircraft, and it looms large among things that concern them safety-wise.

Approach and Landing Risks Prominent – About 51 percent of respondents reported having at least one incident or close call in the last two years during approach and landing, and 8.3 percent estimated four to nine incidents or close calls in that time period. Runway excursions, a related concern, also figured prominently in mishap types that respondents felt merited most attention with regards to risk mitigation.

Policies Lacking for Personal Electronic Devices – While anecdotal rhetoric might imply PED usage is a towering distraction, survey results in this regard tended to characterize the risk of PED-induced distraction as a more modest concern. While 8 percent of respondents viewed it as a "major risk," 53 percent gauged it as a minor risk and 11 percent considered it no risk at all. Further, 68 percent of respondents said that pilot compliance with PED policies was mostly/always followed during flight duties.

Of potentially more concern, however, was that 27 percent reported that their organization had no stated PED policy for pilots during flight duties, and over half said there was no such policy for technicians during maintenance duties. With the respondent pool potentially skewed toward larger and fairly mature operations, this result raised the question of why more than a quarter of such operations might be accepting the risk of operating without setting a PED policy, at least for pilots in flight duties.

Learn More

NBAA's inaugural Business Aviation Leadership Safety Survey was conducted in 2015 by the Risk Assessment Team of the NBAA Safety Committee, and the committee plans to conduct it annually. Review the Top Safety Focus Areas identified by the committee at www.nbaa.org/safety-focus. Learn more about the NBAA Safety Committee at www.nbaa.org/committees. Direct questions about this survey and other committee initiatives to NBAA at ops@nbaa.org.

About NBAA

Founded in 1947 and based in Washington, DC, the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) is the leading organization for companies that rely on general aviation aircraft to help make their businesses more efficient, productive and successful. Contact NBAA at (800) FYI-NBAA or info@nbaa.org. Not a Member? Join today by visiting www.nbaa.org/join.