136263

United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Report to the Honorable
Robert C. Byrd, U.S. Senate

AVIATION SAFETY

Airlines Should Check Pilot Applicants' Safety History

136263

GAO

United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Resources, Community, and
Economic Development Division

B-228633

June 7, 1988

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
United States Senate

Dear Senator Byrd:

In response to your April 20, 1987, letter and subsequent discussions
with your office, we evaluated Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
regulations, policies, and guidance pertaining to pilot hiring for commer-
cial passenger airlines and the type and availability of FAA data on a
pilot's safety background that could be used during the hiring process.
In your letter, you recognized that FAA maintains several data bases
with information on pilot safety violations and stated your view that
airlines should be aware of the safety background of pilots they hire.
Consequently, your letter asked us to (1) identify FAA regulatory
requirements and guidance pertaining to airline pilot hiring practices,
(2) assess pilot safety background information availability, and (3) iden-
tify airline hiring practices for pilot safety background checks.

In summary, we found that

- FAA has few regulatory requirements for airline pilot hiring practices,
  allowing airlines to develop criteria in line with their own corporate
  preferences. FAA does require airline pilots to have a valid certificate,
  issued by FAA, appropriate for the pilot's function and type of plane.
  Airlines are also required to perform a security background check, but
  this requirement is limited to verifying the pilot's employment for 5
  prior years.
- FAA maintains data bases containing records of all pilots' safety history
  and the validity of pilots' certificates. This information can be accessed
  by airlines at a nominal cost. Almost all of the 112 airlines that we sur-
  veyed were aware of the FAA data bases.
- Airline practices regarding pilot safety background checks varied.
  According to our survey of 112 airlines providing regularly scheduled
  service in the lower 48 states, all of the airlines obtained a copy of the
  pilot's certificate. However, 62 percent of the airlines (69 carriers) did
  not verify certificate validity with FAA. While 92 percent of the airlines
  (103 carriers) obtained safety background information from pilots dur-
  ing the hiring process, 23 percent of these airlines did not check with
  FAA to verify safety transgressions pilots reported and 56 percent of

these airlines did not check with FAA to verify a lack of safety transgressions if the pilot reported none.

We believe that FAA should inform airlines about how to access FAA's data bases that contain information on pilot certificates and safety background. Further, FAA should encourage airlines to verify pilot applicant's certificate validity and flying safety history by checking these data bases and using this information in making pilot hiring decisions. While a safety transgression—accident, incident, or safety violation—should not preclude a pilot's employment at an airline, knowledge of such events could allow airlines to take precautions to ensure that the pilot flies as safely as possible.[1]

Pilot Hiring and Safety

Airline pilot hiring has been proceeding at extremely high levels for the last few years. In the last 4 years, airlines have hired an average of about 9,700 new pilots each year, and pilot hiring is expected to continue at high levels based on airline growth and anticipated mandatory retirements. The demand for airline pilots has increased since airline deregulation because the number of flights has increased substantially. Major airlines also need pilots because many of their pilots are approaching mandatory retirement at age 60. Since major airlines often hire pilots from commuter airlines, pilots have been leaving commuter airlines at a high rate. Our data show that commuters replaced 36 percent of their pilots in 1986 and duals replaced 29 percent.[2] (See appendix I for further details.)

FAA data show that a number of pilots qualified to fly for airlines have had some kind of accident, incident, or safety violation. In the last 6 years, FAA suspended or revoked an average of over 800 Air Transport and Commercial pilot certificates per year. In the same period, an average of about 270 accidents and incidents involving pilots qualified to fly for airlines occurred per year. (See appendix II for further details.) The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) cited pilots as a factor in about 95 percent of commuter accidents and 63 percent of major airline

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[1] Aircraft accidents are occurrences associated with the operation of an aircraft in which any person suffers death or serious injury or in which the aircraft receives substantial damage. An incident is an occurrence other than an accident associated with the operation of an aircraft, which affects, or could affect, operational safety. Safety violations involve a breach of federal aviation regulations.

[2] FAA divides scheduled commercial airlines into two basic types, depending on airplane size. Commuter airlines operate under part 135 of the federal aviation regulations, flying aircraft with 30 or fewer passenger seats. Major airlines operate under part 121 of the regulations, flying aircraft with more than 30 passenger seats. Dual airlines operate both types of aircraft.

accidents in 1985, the most recent year that data are available. Between 1980 and 1984, pilots were cited as a factor in 57 percent of commuter accidents and 42 percent of major airline accidents.

Several recent airline accidents involved pilots with previous safety violations. For example, the pilot involved in a March 1987 commuter airline accident at Detroit Metropolitan Airport had been cited twice for unsafe flying, of which the airline was aware. In addition, the first officer in a September 1985 commuter accident had three accidents/incidents on file, of which the airline was not aware. More recently, according to an NTSB official, accident investigators found that both pilots of a commuter plane that crashed January 1988, in Durango, Colorado, had received warning letters from FAA, of which the airline was unaware.

FAA Pilot Hiring Regulations

FAA regulations set minimum acceptable standards for issuing pilot certificates and operating passenger aircraft. FAA regulations require airlines to ensure that any person serving as a captain or copilot hold the appropriate certificate and have the necessary experience. Pilot certificates are essentially licenses to operate aircraft. To serve as captain on most passenger aircraft, a pilot must hold an Airline Transport Pilot certificate, which requires a minimum of 1,500 hours of flying experience.[3] Copilots must hold at least a Commercial Pilot certificate, which requires a minimum of 250 hours of flying experience. FAA issues the certificate after evaluating pilot experience by reviewing the pilot's logbook and the pilot passes written and flight tests.

FAA requires airlines to perform security background checks of employees, including pilots, who have unescorted access to secured airport areas. These security checks are limited to employment verification for the last 5 years; they do not include a check of pilot accident, incident, or violation histories. Recently, the Airport and Airway Safety and Capacity Expansion Act of 1987 gave FAA the authority to access the National Driving Register to determine if a pilot's drivers license had been suspended or revoked for drunk driving or serious traffic violations. FAA plans to issue a notice of proposed rulemaking to determine how this information will be used. Aside from the certificate and security background check requirements, FAA has no other regulations addressing airline pilot hiring practices. Airlines are responsible for developing their own hiring criteria in line with corporate preferences.

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[3]FAA requires an Airline Transport Pilot Certificate for any airline captain flying jet aircraft, aircraft with 10 or more seats, or multi-engine aircraft.

Airlines May Use FAA Data Bases

FAA maintains several data bases on pilots that were initiated to monitor pilots' flying records and identify trends in safety transgressions. Although originally intended as a tool for FAA's use, airlines can obtain information from these data bases about pilots safety history at a nominal cost. While almost all of the airlines we contacted were aware that these data bases exist, not all were aware that they could obtain information about pilot applicants from these data bases, or how to obtain the data. The data bases are the (1) Airman and Aircraft Registry, (2) Accident/Incident Data System, and (3) Enforcement Information System. These data bases, located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, contain information on pilot certificates and a history of accidents, incidents, and safety violations.

The Airman and Aircraft Registry contains information on all FAA certified pilots and can be used by airlines to check the validity of a pilot's certificate. The Accident/Incident Data System can be used by airlines to determine whether a pilot has had any accidents or incidents and describes the circumstances surrounding the occurrence. The Enforcement Information System contains information on agency enforcement proceedings against pilots, including FAA warnings, certificate actions, and monetary penalties. (See appendix III for further details on these data bases.) An FAA official responsible for operating these data bases said that FAA has adequate resources to accommodate requests by all passenger airlines.

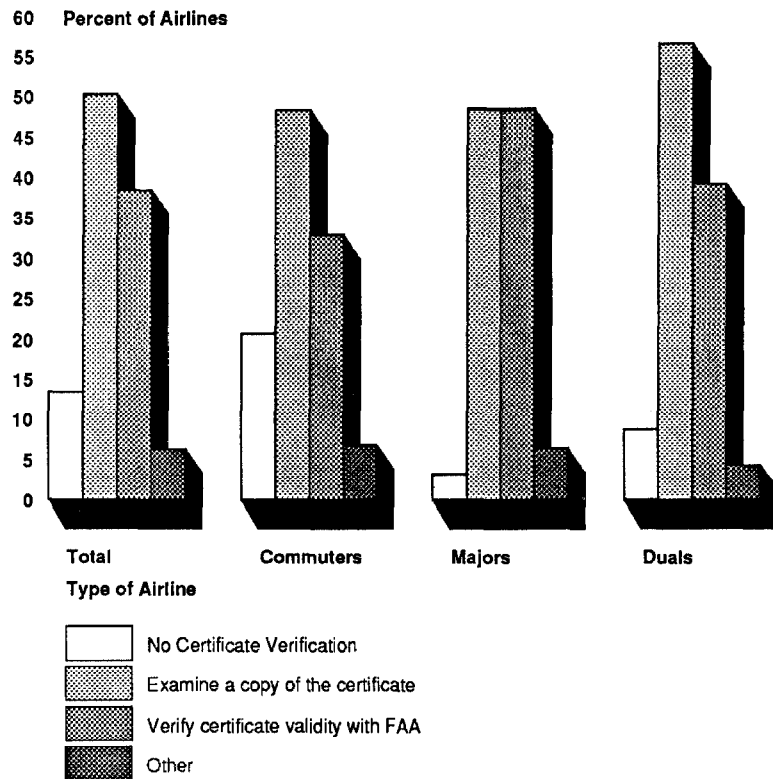# Certificates and Safety Records Often Not Verified

To obtain information on industry hiring practices, and specifically to determine whether airlines were verifying pilot certificates and safety history, we conducted structured telephone interviews with managers from 112 airlines. The 112 airlines represent all but 4 of the airlines in the lower 48 states providing regularly scheduled passenger service. These 112 include: 31 major airlines, 58 commuter airlines, and 23 dual airlines. Four airlines, one major and three commuters, declined to participate in our study. The data presented in the following text and figures were gathered from our telephone interviews, which were conducted between October 27 and November 17, 1987. We found that many airlines did not use FAA's data bases to verify pilot applicant certificate validity or to check safety background.

Certificate Validity

Verifying pilot certificate validity with FAA's Airman and Aircraft Registry is the most reliable method available; however, figure 1 shows that

about 38 percent of the airlines (43 carriers) used this method for the pilots they had hired since January 1, 1987.

Figure 1: Certificate Verification Methods

60   Percent of Airlines

Type of Airline

Total   Commuters   Majors   Duals

☐ No Certificate Verification

▨ Examine a copy of the certificate

▨ Verify certificate validity with FAA

■ Other

Totals may add to more than 100 percent because of multiple responses

All of the airlines we surveyed said that they obtained a copy of a pilot's certificate prior to employment. Fifty percent of the airlines (56 carriers) told us that examining the copy was the only verification performed. Examining a certificate copy may not be adequate to assure validity because pilots could have copies even if the certificate has been revoked and confiscated by FAA. About 13 percent of the airlines we surveyed (14 carriers) did not verify pilot certificate validity.

Safety Background

Although 92 percent of the airlines requested pilots to indicate on their application any history of accidents, incidents, or safety violations, figure 2 shows that 23 percent (24 carriers) who requested the information did not verify reported transgressions with FAA's Accident/Incident Data System or the Enforcement Information System.

**Figure 2: Airlines Verifying Accident, Incident, and Safety Violation Data Provided by Pilot Applicants**

100   Percent of Airlines

Type of Airline

☐ Airlines verifying pilot applicant data
▨ Airlines not verifying pilot applicant data
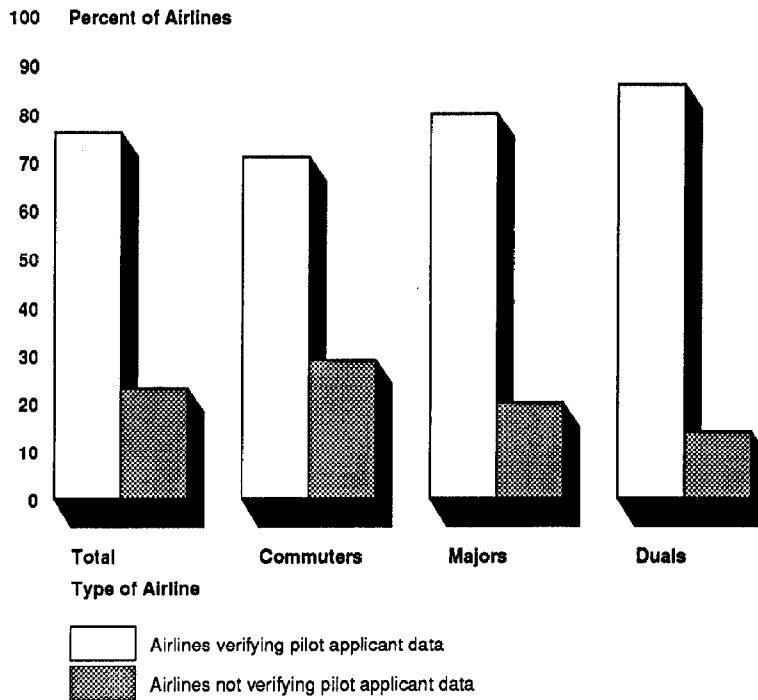
The reasons given by the 24 airlines for not verifying pilot-reported safety transgressions with FAA varied. The most cited reason (8 of 24) was their perception that it took too long to receive information from FAA. However, we found that most of the airlines using the data bases received the information relatively quickly. About half of the airlines that verified pilot safety background (35 of 79) told us that they received the data in less than 1 week, and about 27 percent (21 of 79) reported receiving the data in 1-2 weeks. An FAA official told us that, on average, they process requests for information within 5 working days; however, requests for information on a large number of pilots could take longer. The information could also take longer to obtain if the airlines

obtain the information indirectly through the FAA principal operations inspector, who is responsible for inspecting airline operations, rather than requesting the information directly from Oklahoma City.

If a pilot applicant did not indicate any previous safety transgressions, about 56 percent (58 carriers) of the airlines that requested safety background information from pilots did not verify the lack of transgressions with FAA. Figure 3 shows that about 60 percent of the commuters and duals and 43 percent of the majors, who requested safety background information during the hiring process, did not verify a pilot's safety record when the pilot indicated no history of safety transgressions.

Figure 3: Airlines Verifying the Lack of Accidents, Incidents, and Safety Violations
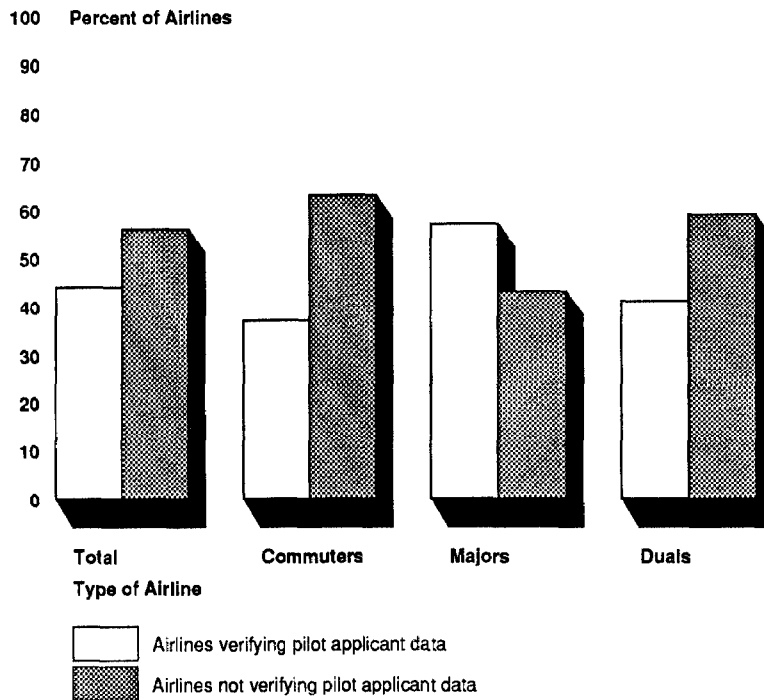
How Airlines Use the Safety Information

More than half of the airline officials said that a previous accident, incident, or violation would not preclude their hiring a pilot. If a pilot indicated a history of safety transgressions, 54 percent of the 103 airlines that obtained safety information from pilot applicants said that the data

provided specifics that helped them better assess the circumstances surrounding the event to determine appropriate action. If a pilot did not indicate any prior safety transgressions and the airline's verification process found a history of safety transgressions, 77 percent of the 79 airlines that verify safety background information with FAA said they would not hire the pilot.

Other Pilot Hiring Practices

Airlines use other methods to evaluate pilot applicants besides checking FAA data bases. Our survey showed that airlines were using proficiency tests, drug tests, psychological tests, company physicals, logbook reviews, and reference checks. The extent that airlines reported using these methods varied considerably. (Appendix IV provides details on each method.)

Conclusions

Pilot hiring is expected to continue near the elevated levels experienced for the past few years based on airline growth and anticipated mandatory retirements. The high percentage of accidents and incidents in which pilot error was a factor, and accidents involving pilots with a history of safety transgressions, indicate that airlines should use available resources to help assure that the pilots they hire fly as safely as possible.

Our survey found that airlines engage in a variety of pre-employment screening activities to evaluate pilot applicants. FAA regulations require pilots to have the appropriate certificate and level of experience and require the airline to conduct a security investigation of the pilot's previous 5 years' employment. Many airlines also require pilot applicants to undergo physical examinations and psychological, drug, and proficiency tests. Almost all of the airlines were aware of the Airman and Aircraft Registry, Accident/Incident Data System, and the Enforcement Information System. Although these data bases are readily available to airlines, many airlines did not use them to verify information supplied by pilot applicants on pilot certificates or safety history. Concern about the time involved to obtain this information was the reason given by some of the airlines for not using the data bases. However, we found that about half the airlines using the data bases received a response within 1 week, and almost three-quarters received a response in less than 2 weeks.

While an accident, incident, or safety violation should not necessarily preclude a pilot's employment at an airline, knowledge of such events could allow airlines to take precautions to ensure that the pilot does not

repeat past errors. Since the information is readily available and relatively inexpensive, prudent practice would suggest that airlines should utilize these data bases to verify pilot certificates and safety history. FAA could increase the use of these data bases by informing all airlines about how to access the data bases and actively encouraging their use.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Secretary of Transportation direct the Administrator, Federal Aviation Administration, to:

- Inform all airlines about how to access the Airman and Aircraft Registry; the Accident/Incident Data System; and the Enforcement Information System.
- Encourage airlines to verify pilot applicant's certificate validity with the Airman and Aircraft Registry and verify the pilot's flying safety history with FAA's Accident/Incident Data System and the Enforcement Information System and use this information in making pilot hiring decisions.
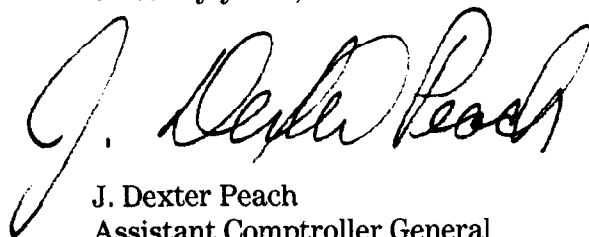
In conducting our review, we examined pertinent legislation, regulations, and FAA handbooks and interviewed airline managers and FAA officials. We also collected information from 112 airlines representing 96 percent of the carriers providing regularly scheduled passenger service in the lower 48 states. We performed our review in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. (See appendix V for a more detailed discussion of our scope and methodology.)

As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from the date of this letter. At that time, we will send copies to the Secretary of Transportation and the Administrator, FAA. We will also make copies available to others upon request. We discussed the results of our review with agency officials who generally agreed with the facts presented. At your request, we did not obtain official agency comments on a draft of

this report. This work was done under the direction of Kenneth M. Mead, Associate Director. Major contributors are listed in appendix VI.

Sincerely yours,

J. Dexter Peach
Assistant Comptroller General

Contents

Abbreviations

FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
GAO	General Accounting Office
NTSB	National Transportation Safety Board

Airline Pilot Replacement Rate

We obtained data on the number of pilots leaving and joining the airlines we surveyed to calculate the replacement rate. The replacement rate is the percentage of pilots employed by the airline as of January 1, 1986, that were replaced during calendar year 1986. This differs from the turnover rate because the turnover rate uses the average number of pilots employed during the year.

Our data indicate a relatively high replacement rate for commuters, 36 percent, as opposed to a very low replacement rate for majors, 3 percent. As shown in table I.1, the total replacement rate for all 57 commuters was 36 percent. Table I.2 shows that the replacement rate for all 23 duals was 29 percent. The 13 dual airlines with over 20 aircraft had the greatest replacement rate of 32 percent. Table I.3 shows that the major airlines had the lowest replacement rate. The replacement rate for all 30 majors was 3 percent. Airlines with fleet sizes greater than 20 had replacement rates of 3 percent. Airlines with fleet sizes of fewer than 19 had higher replacement rates.

Table I.1: Commuter Airline Pilot Replacement Rate

Aircraft fleet size	Number of airlines in category[a]	Replacement rate (percent)	Number of pilots replaced
1 – 9	35	33	209
10 – 19	15	36	212
20 – 29	3	39	66
30 – 39	2	30	93
40 – 49	1	19	28
50 – +	1	53	158
Total	**57**	**36**	**766**

[a]One commuter airline did not respond to this portion of our survey.

Table I.2: Dual Airline Pilot Replacement Rate

Aircraft fleet size	Number of airlines in category	Replacement rate (percent)	Number of pilots replaced
1 – 9	4	21	21
10 – 19	6	18	63
20 – +	13	32	722
Total	**23**	**29**	**806**

Table I.3: Major Airline Pilot Replacement Rate

Aircraft fleet size	Number of airlines in category[a]	Replacement rate (percent)	Number of pilots replaced
1 – 9	10	14	40
10 – 19	4	11	38
20 – 49	4	3	37
50 – 99	3	3	51
100 – +	9	3	735
Total	**30**	**3**	**901**

[a]One major airline did not respond to this portion of our survey.

FAA Certificate Actions and Accidents/ Incidents Involving Pilots Qualified to Fly for Airlines

In 1987 about 235,000 pilots were qualified to work as airline pilots. Of this number, 91,287 held Airline Transport Certificates and 143,645 held Commercial Pilot Certificates. As shown in table II.1, between 1982 and 1987, 4,993 pilots with Airline Transport, or Commercial Pilot certificates, committed safety transgressions serious enough for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to revoke or suspend their certificate. During that same period, 1,637 accidents or incidents occurred involving pilots qualified to fly for airlines.

Table II.1: Certificate Suspensions and Revocations

	Air Transport Pilot Certificates		Commercial Pilot Certificates	
	Suspension	Revocation	Suspension	Revocation
1982	46	3	90	13
1983	161	17	323	44
1984	335	43	687	102
1985	426	68	755	128
1986	322	42	458	80
1987	292	33	477	48
Total	**1,582**	**206**	**2,790**	**415**

Total suspensions and revocations: 4,993.

Source: FAA.

Table II.2: Accidents/Incidents Involving Pilots Qualified to Fly for Airlines

	Air Transport Pilot Certificates	Commercial Pilot Certificates
1982	155	185
1983	172	187
1984	150	188
1985	152	136
1986	126	113
1987	43	30
Total	**798**	**839**

Total accidents and incidents: 1,637.

Source: FAA.

FAA Data Bases: Contents and Obtaining Access

FAA maintains three data bases that contain information on pilot certificates and pilot safety background. Airlines can access all three data bases, although there is a nominal charge for two of them. This appendix provides information on the contents of each data base and how an airline can obtain information from each.

Airmen and Aircraft Registry

This data base can be used to verify a pilot's certificate and type rating, which indicates a pilot's qualification for flying a specific type of aircraft. All airlines have access to this data upon request. Airmen and Aircraft Registry information can be obtained by submitting a written request specifying the pilot's name, birth date, and certificate number to the FAA Airman Certificates Branch, (AAC-260), P.O. Box 25082, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73125. There is no charge for inquiries made by airlines to verify pilot certificates. This data base covers 1945 to the present.

Accident/Incident Data System

This data base provides information on aviation accidents and incidents that were reported to FAA. All airlines have access to this data upon request. Information can be obtained by submitting a written request specifying the pilot's name, birth date, and certificate number to FAA's National Safety Data Branch, (AVN-120), P.O. Box 25082, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73125. The information will cost $2.00 per accident search, $2.00 per incident search, and $2.00 for each additional accident or incident cited. This data base covers 1973 to the present.

Enforcement Information System

This data base contains information on agency enforcement proceedings against pilots, including FAA warnings, certificate actions, and monetary penalties documented in a pilot's record. Airlines can access this information by submitting a written request stating the pilot's name, birth date, and certificate number to FAA National Safety Data Branch, (AVN-120), P.O. Box 25082, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73125. The information will cost the airline $2.00 per each pilot violation report requested. This data base covers 1963 to the present.

Other Pilot Hiring Practices

Airlines use other methods to evaluate pilot applicants during the hiring process in addition to using FAA data bases to verify pilot certificates and check pilot safety records. We surveyed 112 airlines to determine which other methods airlines were using and how extensively they were being used. We found considerable variation among airlines: 43 percent of the airlines (48 carriers) reported using several different methods, including company physical examinations, proficiency tests, drug testing, and checking logbooks; 51 percent of the airlines (57 carriers) were using one proficiency test; and 6 percent of the airlines (7 carriers) were not performing any of these pilot evaluations.

Pilot Logbook Verification

A pilot's logbook, which pilots maintain on an honor system, is the primary source for determining a pilot's flying experience. Logbooks contain information such as total flying hours and the type of flying experience. To determine if a pilot has flown the minimum number of hours to qualify for a certificate, FAA, or its designee, reviews a pilot's logbook. Precisely verifying the number of hours in a pilot's log is not always possible, depending on the type of flying a pilot has done, especially if the pilot's experience is primarily private flying. FAA makes more detailed checks only if it suspects falsification.

Most airlines have their own experience requirements and will review pilot logbooks to evaluate pilot applicant experience. Only 6 of the 112 airlines told us that they were not examining or verifying pilot logbooks. About 45 percent (50 carriers) of the airlines we surveyed reported verifying pilot experience by examining the logbook. Other methods include checking the former employer, aircraft use data, and flight school records.

Checking Former Employers

Eighty-two percent (92 carriers) of the airlines we surveyed told us that they contacted former employers to obtain information on pilot applicants. The type of information most frequently requested was the length of employment, quality of the employee's work, and the employee's general attitude. Some airlines reported requesting information on any disciplinary action and the reason for the separation.

Company Physical Examinations

FAA requires pilots to pass an initial FAA physical to receive a certificate and to pass biannual or annual physical examinations depending on the certificate type, as long as the certificate is in effect. Twenty-eight percent of the airlines we surveyed (31 carriers) require pilot applicants to take a company physical examination as part of the hiring process as shown in figure IV.1. The percentage of airlines using physical examinations was significantly higher for major airlines than for commuters or duals. Of the 81 airlines that were not requiring physical examinations, 17 (21 percent) were considering making company physical examinations an employment prerequisite.

Figure IV.1: Airline Use of Company Physical Examinations

65   Percent of Airlines

Legend:
Total
Commuters
Majors
Dual

X-axis:
Currently Use Physical Examinations
Considering Company Physical Examinations
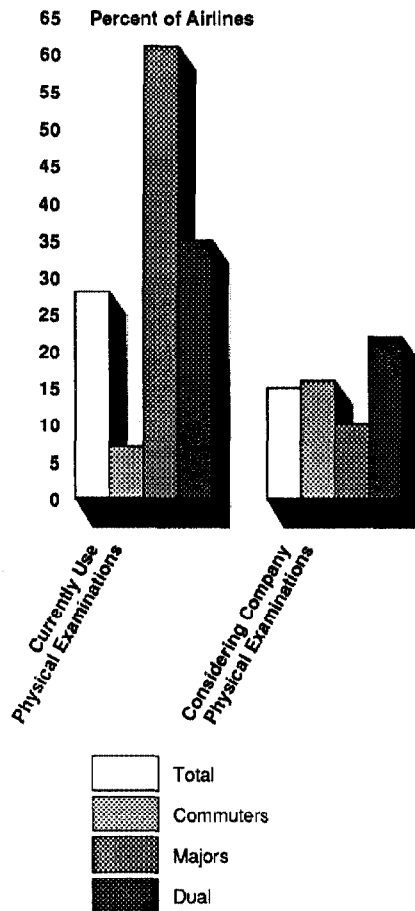
Drug Testing

FAA currently has no regulations requiring airline pilot drug testing. To determine the extent of airline drug testing to evaluate pilot applicants, we asked airlines whether they require pilot applicants to undergo drug testing. As shown in figure IV.2, of the 112 airlines we surveyed, 36 percent (40 carriers) were administering drug tests to pilot applicants. The majority of major airlines were requiring drug tests, but few commuter airlines were. Almost half of the airlines that were not administering drug tests said that they were considering using such tests.

Figure IV.2: Airline Use of Drug Testing

65   Percent of Airlines

Currently Use Drug Testing

Considering Using Drug Testing

Total
Commuters
Majors
Dual
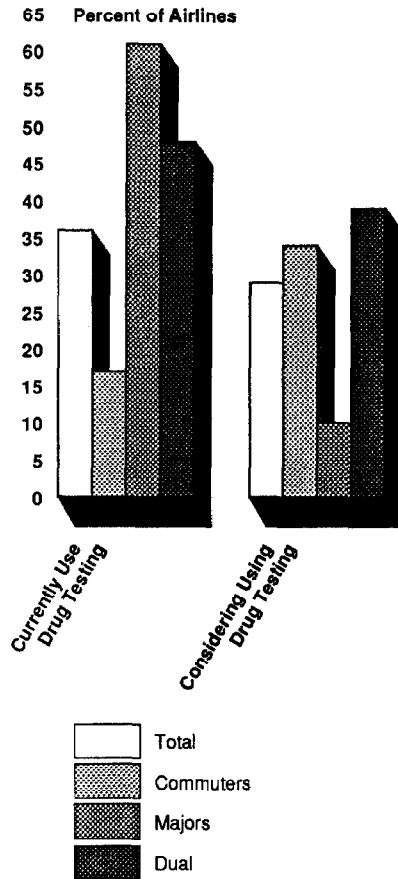
Psychological Testing

Although FAA regulations do not require pilot applicant psychological testing, some airlines reported administering these tests as part of their pre-employment process. As shown in figure IV.3, of the airlines surveyed, 19 percent (21 airlines) were requiring pilot applicants to undergo psychological testing. Over 45 percent (14 airlines) of the major airlines were using psychological tests, but testing by commuters and duals was much less prevalent. Of the 91 airlines that were not requiring pilot applicants to be psychologically tested, 26 (29 percent) said that they were considering this testing.

Figure IV.3: Airline Use of Psychological Testing
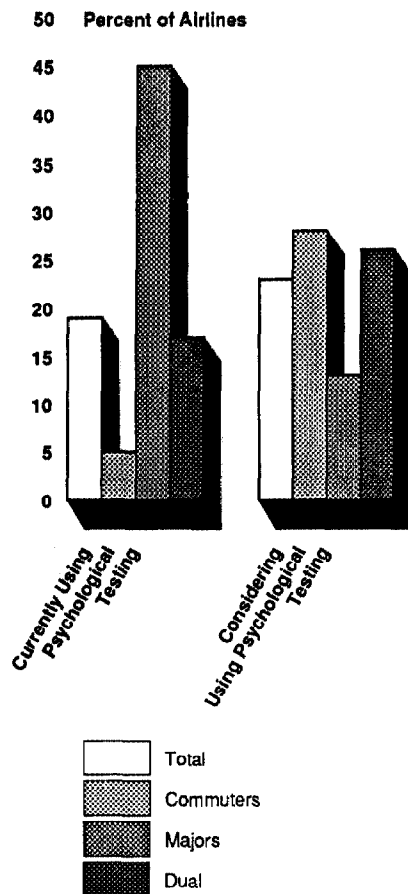
Pilot Proficiency Tests

Ninety-four percent (105 carriers) of the airlines we surveyed reported administering at least one type of proficiency test to evaluate pilot applicants. As shown in figure IV.4, about 84 percent of the commuters administered flight checks, which evaluate a pilot's flying skills in a plane, compared with 45 percent of the majors and 48 percent of the duals. About 84 percent of the majors and 70 percent of the duals reported giving simulator checks, which evaluate a pilot's flying skills in a flight simulator, compared with 29 percent of the commuters.

Figure IV.4: Airline Use of Proficiency Testing

Percent of Airlines

Type of Test

Total
Commuters
Majors
Dual
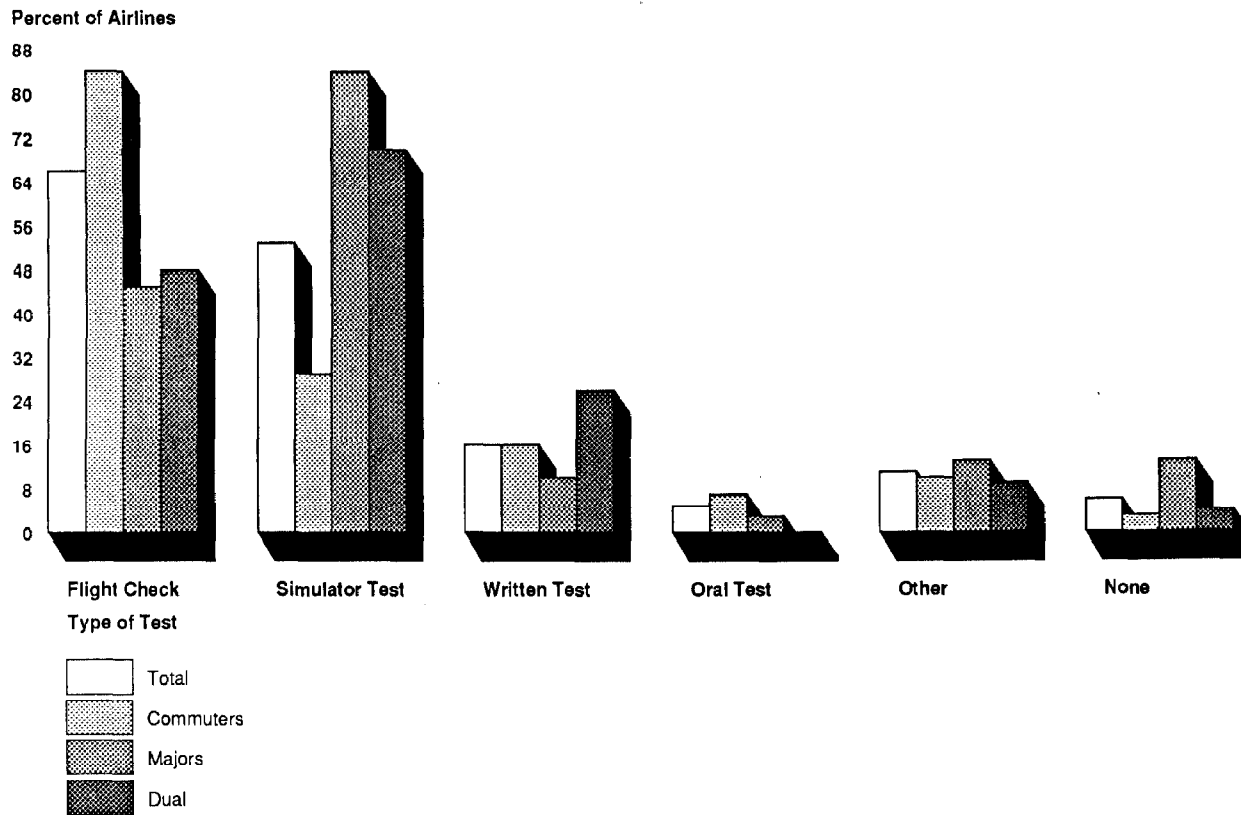
Private Contractor Background Checks

Of the 112 airlines contacted, about 11 percent (12 carriers) said that they hired private companies to perform background checks on pilots. These 12 airlines consisted of 8 majors, 1 dual, and 3 commuters. The airlines said that typically they received the following types of information.

- Prior employment records.
- Educational records.
- References.
- Law enforcement record.
- Driving record.
- Credit history.

Scope and Methodology

To identify FAA requirements and guidance pertaining to airline pilot hiring practices, we reviewed the Federal Aviation Act of 1958, as amended; applicable regulations; and FAA policies and handbooks. We discussed hiring practices with FAA headquarters officials in Washington, D.C.; regional officials at the Southern Regional Office in Atlanta, Georgia; and the Western Pacific Regional Office in Los Angeles, California; and with officials at Flight Standards district offices in Atlanta and Los Angeles.

To assess pilot safety background information, we contacted officials at FAA's National Safety Data Branch and Airman and Aircraft Registry in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. We discussed

- what types of information are available,
- who has access to that information,
- how much airlines pay for the information,
- how long it takes to respond to an information request,
- how many monthly requests they receive from airlines, and
- whether they could accommodate additional airline requests.

We also obtained the number of certificate actions and accidents/incidents against pilots qualified to fly for airlines each year from the National Safety Data Branch. At FAA's Western Pacific Regional Office and the Los Angeles District Office, we obtained computer printouts of sample pilot safety records.

To identify if airline hiring practices include pilot safety background checks, we obtained from FAA a list of all airlines operating under 14 CFR 121 (major) and 14 CFR 135 (commuter) and those operating under both (dual). From that list, we identified those airlines in the lower 48 states providing regularly scheduled passenger service and limited our review to these airlines in order to facilitate data acquisition. We then contacted FAA's Flight Standards district office managers to assure that these airlines were currently operating regularly scheduled passenger service. Next, we designed a questionnaire to identify industry pilot hiring practices, with particular emphasis on how extensively the airlines made use of the information in FAA's data bases.

We contacted managers for all 116 airlines that were operating regularly scheduled passenger service. The type of manager we contacted varied with the airline. Before contacting the airlines, we notified FAA's principal operations inspector for each airline that we would be conducting

the interviews. The inspectors helped identify the correct airline manager to question. Four airlines refused to discuss their hiring practices with us over the telephone, leaving a sample of 112 airlines. After the initial telephone interview, we followed up by mailing out a list of additional questions that required the airlines to compile data. All but two of the 112 responded to the follow-up questionnaire. We reviewed the airlines' responses and conducted a computer analysis to determine the extent to which airlines are using FAA data and other techniques to assess pilot applicants. The questionnaire and analysis became our basis for determining pilot hiring trends and practices. We conducted our work at FAA offices in Washington, D.C.; Atlanta; and Los Angeles between June 1987 and January 1988.

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