

Aviation industry sets out to make all aerodromes safer

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Midrand - The South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) together with key aviation industry organisations have set in motion a process aimed at improving safety at all aerodromes.

“The current economic downturn notwithstanding, civil aviation is a generally exponentially growing industry with an increasing number of people opting for it as a speedy mode of transport. Moreover, growth in the tourism industry as well as recreational flying has also propelled the number of people taking to the skies. While these are positive developments for the aviation industry and the economy, the downside thereof is that there is also an increasing number of smaller aerodromes being established, with a significant number of them being unlicensed and therefore unregulated. Whether these smaller aerodromes are adhering to the required safety standards, is anyone’s guess,” says Captain Colin Jordaan, Commissioner for Civil Aviation and Chief Executive Officer of the SACAA.

Capt. Jordaan further says that the recent spate of incidents involving light aircraft suggests the need to pay closer attention to safety standards among light aircraft and smaller aerodrome operators. “It will not be far-fetched to conclude that some operators put operational costs and profit margins ahead of safety. Be that as it may, we cannot continue with a situation whereby anyone who can afford a light aircraft gets away with merely clearing the woods in his backyard to make way for a landing strip. The risks are even higher when you are using the aircraft and the facility for business purposes, for instance, transporting tourists into game farms or operating microlight flying schools,” he explains.

It is understood that in most cases, the onus is on the pilot to establish the safety of an aerodrome before landing; and this usually takes the form of a verbal report from an aerodrome owner. However, safety is jeopardised in cases where technical standards are not adhered to in terms of runway specifications, including coordinates as well as the length and width of a runway.

“It is encouraging, though, to note that a number of key industry role players are keen to work hand-in-hand with the CAA in order to do away with the risky *status quo*. At the end of the day it would be in everyone’s interest if we had no accidents and as such no costly claims that usually follow after an accident,” he says.

Capt. Jordaan adds that the process of ensuring safety at all 'places of departure' has already begun. Thus far a representative workgroup has been formed and comprises, among others, the SACAA, Airport Operators Association, Aero Club of South Africa, Soaring Society of South Africa, and Microlight Section of the Aero Club of South Africa. The primary task of this workgroup is to formulate regulations and technical standards that will regulate all landing and departure points in South Africa.

"The workgroup has made some progress and we are confident that by the end of the year we would have made serious inroads toward ensuring that all our aerodromes are conforming to internationally acceptable safety standards," concludes Capt. Jordaan.

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About the CAA:

The South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) was established on 1 October 1998 following the enactment of the South African Civil Aviation Authority Act, No.40, in September of the same year. The SACAA promotes and maintains a safe, secure and sustainable civil aviation environment, by regulating and overseeing the functioning and development of the industry in an efficient, cost-effective, and customer-friendly manner according to international standards.

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