

MEDIA STATEMENT

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SA CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY CONCERNED OVER SPIKE IN AIRCRAFT ACCIDENTS

[Johannesburg] The South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA), a public agency reporting to the Department of Transport and tasked with civil aviation safety and security oversight, has raised concerns over the recent spike in aircraft accidents. In just one month, i.e. January 2021, 14 accidents were reported, with 04 being fatal accidents that claimed the lives of 08 people.

“While air transport still remains the safest among all modes of transport, to us as the regulator, one life lost is just one too many. With stringent regulations in place, coupled with layers of checks and balances, the expectation is that the measures inherent in the system, i.e., both safety and security, should work as they are supposed to,” said Ms Poppy Khoza, who leads the SACAA as Director of Civil Aviation (CEO).

The last time South Africa experienced such a high number of accidents was in October 2008, subsequently dubbed ‘black October’, when 20 accidents were recorded in that month, resulting in 08 fatal accidents that claimed 26 lives.

“Whilst the accident rate is not currently at that level, it is quite concerning that we have had so many accidents in just one month. We cannot afford to have a recurrence of the October 2008 statistics, hence we sound warning bells to all operators to ensure strict adherence to aviation safety and security regulations.

“As much as investigations into the cause(s) of the recent accidents are still ongoing, a review of finalised reports from previous accidents points to a few common causal factors. At the top of the list is ‘flight crew’, followed by ‘aircraft operations’, ‘mechanical or engine failure’, and other various factors. In effect, this means that there are no new or unknown aircraft accident causal factors. The causes have been the same since the beginning of air transport, more than a century ago. The main question remains, why do accidents continue when we know the causes? Could it be a matter of attitude and not necessarily aptitude?” Khoza pondered.

Khoza’s comment comes days after a video of a Robinson R22 helicopter was seen flying recklessly in what appeared to be a show-off session by the pilot to friends on the ground, who were seemingly enjoying a braai and beverages.

“A regulation enforcement investigation is under way regarding this incident. The manner in which the helicopter is flown goes against all characteristics of good airmanship, and possibly also against flight operations law and aircraft limitations. Regardless, the investigation will reveal the real facts regarding this matter,” Khoza said.

The recent spate of accidents comes just months after the launch of the General Aviation Safety Strategy (GASS).

“The GASS and its implementation plan are tools that will span the 2020-21 to 2024-25 financial years and are aimed at curbing accidents in the private and recreational flying sector, commonly referred to as ‘general aviation’. It would appear that the general aviation sector has not fully adopted the safety principles that are applied in the commercial scheduled operations or airline sector, which has not recorded a passenger fatality airline accident in more than 30 years on South African soil. This is a record we are proud of and want the general aviation sector to emulate,” said Khoza.

She appealed for collaboration from all concerned, adding that accidents don’t just happen out of the blue.

“A series of events usually lead to an accident. Hence, we appeal to everyone to live by the mantra that ‘you see something unbecoming, you say something’, because that could save someone’s life, including yours,” Khoza said.

Compliance with national and international standards

An off-site validation that was conducted in October 2020 by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to confirm the correctness of the submitted evidence by South Africa to close the audit findings emanating from the 2017 ICAO audit, resulted in the improvement of our country’s ICAO Effective Implementation (EI) rating from 87.41 to 88.68%. This cements South Africa’s place among the top compliant countries on matters of aviation safety and security oversight and administration.

“Considering our world ranking in terms of compliance, coupled with the numerous clean audit opinions that the SACAA has received from the Auditor-General for several consecutive years, it means we are calling for and demanding strict compliance to the aviation laws of our country that we as the SACAA are similarly capable of upholding. Compliance in all aspects of aviation should become second nature for every aviator,” Khoza concluded.

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About the SACAA:

The South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) is a Schedule 3A public entity reporting to the Department of Transport established in terms of the Civil Aviation Authority Act, 2009 (Act No 13 of 2009) (the Act). In terms of mandate, the SACAA is tasked with promoting and maintaining 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. The SACAA is governed and controlled by the Civil Aviation Authority Board.

For more information contact:

Name: Kabelo Ledwaba	Email: ledwabak@caa.co.za	Email: media@caa.co.za
Mobile: 083 451 2616	Website: www.caa.co.za	