
SACAA PRESS RELEASE

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SACAA's response to the recent aircraft accidents in the general aviation sector

The South African Civil Aviation Authority notes with great concern, the spate of fatal aircraft accidents within the general aviation sector which has shocked the country in recent weeks. In the past 3 weeks of October, South Africa has experienced an unprecedented number of fatal accidents whose cause is under investigation. Since 1 October, there have been a total of 12 accidents of which 7 have been fatal resulting in 23 fatalities. This is compared to a total of 8 accidents, 1 fatal accident and 1 fatality in October of 2007. Included in these statistics is the accident which occurred on 5 October when a total of 9 people lost their lives near Barberton and the Wesbank Raceway accident near Rand Airport in which 6 people died on 21 October 2008.

It should be noted that there is not a common thread that can be identified as being a specific cause in these recent accidents that we can take action on, other than the pilots of these aircraft were not very experienced.

A total of 103 accidents and 34 fatalities have been recorded from April – October 2008 compared to 102 accidents and 15 fatalities during the same period last year. However, the 5 year comparison table below indicates that, notwithstanding the growth in the aviation industry, the rate of accident occurrences has been steady around 1,6% year on year which makes the current year no different, other than the number of fatalities experienced this month.

Five-year Comparison Table

The table below shows accidents and serious incidents reported as required by the Civil Aviation Regulations, during the past five calendar years:

Year	Total Registered Aircraft	Total accidents	% Accidents in relation to Registered Aircraft	Total number of fatal accidents	Total number of fatalities
2003	8 403	139	1.65%	17	48
2004	8 822	149	1.69%	17	34
2005	9 314	152	1.63%	18	33
2006	9 782	169	1.73%	29	50
2007	10 189	168	1.65%	26	38

“The Authority would like to assure South Africans that all aircraft accidents are an area of great concern for the Authority, and regulations and procedures are continually being updated to address problem areas” said Captain Colin Jordaan, Commissioner for Civil Aviation. Various interventions are being put in place and if implemented diligently could yield positive results in the near future. The leading cause of these accidents as proven by the outcomes of the completed accident investigations has consistently pointed to human factors as a leading cause of fatal accidents. “Human factors include incidents where aviation personnel ignore obvious things like the weather conditions, complying with the required weight allowed by aircraft manufacturers and flying without enough fuel, etc. etc.” said Capt. Jordaan.

A General Aviation Strategic Initiative (GASI) committee has been set up comprising of members of the CAA and specialists in the aviation industry. Senior members of the airline industry who are still involved in general aviation have this week offered to make their expertise available and join the committee. This committee is required to come up with practical solutions to the findings raised during accident investigations. Amongst these is the production of visual material in the form of DVDs which illustrate and warn the industry against common mistakes committed by crew members which have resulted in accidents previously. Also included in these initiatives is creating better access to information for pilots of smaller aircraft which would not normally be accessible to them due to the cost of accessing such information. In addition to this, the Commissioner is planning to negotiate an agreement with the Air Traffic and Navigation Services organisation to provide selected additional services to the general aviation sector operators at an affordable cost.

The Authority is calling for any useful input from members of the industry in fighting this undesirable state of general aviation aircraft safety record. We will also tap into the experience of the scheduled commercial airline sector which has an excellent safety record. South Africa is an extremely safe country to fly in provided you are in a commercial jet aircraft. There has never been a fatality on South African soil involving a commercial jet aircraft since the very first such flight took place between London and Johannesburg in 1952, and this includes foreign operators. This speaks volumes for our infrastructure and culture of safety that has been inculcated in the commercial airline sector over the years. One does not want to tempt fate by repeating this statistic and we are constantly vigilant to ensure that this incredible safety record is maintained. We need to find a way to migrate this to General Aviation.

“I would like to assure the travelling public that we take our mandate very seriously and we will continue to endeavour to decrease the number of accidents occurring within this sector of aviation in our country”, says Capt. Jordaan.

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