

Security vs. Safety: Putting It into Perspective



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September 11, 2001: a day that changed the airline industry forever. It was a day that impacted our professional lives more than any other day in history. Today, airline profits have given way to huge losses. Pilot hiring has given way to pilot furloughs. Captain upgrades have been replaced by downgrades to First Officer. We no longer think in terms of merging with another airline, but rather think about basic survival.

Of the concerns we face as pilots, security is arguably the most on our minds. We are constantly reminded about it. It's been one of the lead stories on the six o'clock news every night since the September attacks. We see the National Guard in the terminals. As crewmembers, we are subjected to more intense and at times inconsistent screening, and our cockpits have temporary bars installed to prevent access from unwanted intruders. Our ALPA leadership is seen testifying on Capitol Hill about airline security and Congress is passing security legislation. Representatives from ALPA Engineering and Air Safety are meeting regularly with airline managements, FAA and aircraft manufacturers to develop procedures and designs for such things as emergency transponders, aircraft maneuvering, and permanent reinforced cockpit doors.

While all of this activity is necessary given the threats and the environment we now operate in, as line pilots we must put this all into perspective and not forget the continued importance of operating our airplanes with consistent safe operating practices. Cockpit distractions are the enemy to a safe flight. Distractions allow

errors to occur in our operation and those errors, if undetected by the crewmembers, can lead to undesired consequences.

We must also not lose sight of the many safety programs and initiatives that have been developed over the years. In a recent editorial in *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, former National Transportation Safety Board Vice Chairman Robert T. Francis wrote:

“Post-Sept. 11, we see diversion of resources from safety to security priorities throughout aviation—whether it be airports, FAA, NASA or the carriers. There is ample justification for

this security focus, but we must not forget our old friend safety. If safety is our number one priority, we must be particularly vigilant now for less-than-thoughtful obsession with pistols for pilots, nail clippers, automatic ground-controlled landing or privately hired sky marshals.”

While the current security issues are obviously on our minds, we must not allow those issues to take precedence over safety. We cannot afford for new security measures to interfere with the safe operation of our airliners. We must not lose sight of the safety advances that have served us so well, such as FOQA, ASAP, CRM, and LOSA. These types of safety initiatives have had a tremendous impact on reducing the accident rate for the entire airline industry.

Undoubtedly, improving airline security for our fellow crewmembers and passengers is of utmost importance. However, those improvements will be lost or ineffective if we accept anything less than the best in flight crew train-

ing, the safest operating procedures and practices and the continued quest for programs and methods to enhance airline safety.

Fly safe, and thank you for making safety your number one priority.

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