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SAFETYWIRE

FAA Sees Results from Targeting Hotspot Airports

(**Source:** Matt Thurber, AIN, April 23, 2025)

In an April 22 update from acting FAA Administrator Chris Rocheleau, the FAA highlighted positive results from analysis of hotspot airports and other high-risk areas. This effort is a result of the January 29 midair collision at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (KDCA) between a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter and a PSA Airlines CRJ, killing all 67 people on both aircraft.

Following release of the NTSB's preliminary report on the midair collision, Rocheleau testified before the U.S. Senate on March 27, outlining plans "to analyze other airports that have both charted helicopter routes and nearby airplane traffic."

This effort includes assessing offshore helicopter operations in the Gulf and "using machine learning and language modeling to scan incident reports and mine multiple data sources to find themes and areas of risk." The FAA also permanently restricted non-essential helicopter operations and eliminated mixed helicopter and fixed-wing traffic around KDCA.

The FAA's analysis has already uncovered issues at Harry Reid International Airport (KLAS) in Las Vegas, such as "agreements with local helicopter operators [that] require them to avoid arrival and departure corridors that lack defined vertical or lateral measurements." Air tour helicopters returning to the airport and arriving and departing airplanes were not receiving traffic advisories from tower controllers, according to Rocheleau, "resulting in a routine lack of compliance with Class B separation rules."

After requiring positive control over helicopters and the issuance of more traffic advisories to pilots, "the number of traffic alert and collision avoidance system reports decreased by 30% in just three weeks," he said. More actions are planned for the Las Vegas area, and the FAA is examining issues at other airports.

Another area of focus is the mix of faster- and slower-moving airplanes, and the FAA is already examining traffic flows around Hollywood Burbank (KBUR) and Van Nuys (KVNY) airports in Southern California. "They're less than 10 miles apart, each serve a wide mix of aircraft, and they have closely spaced arrival and departure paths," Rocheleau said.

On April 22, the FAA outlined the work on hotspot airports during a rotorcraft safety roundtable attended by FAA personnel, rotorcraft associations, safety organizations, and rotorcraft operators.

"But while the recent public focus has been on interactions between helicopters and airplanes, the core rotorcraft safety issues remain operations and maintenance," Rocheleau said. "The top causes of accidents are loss of control, striking an object during low-altitude operations, and both unintentional and intentional flight into instrument meteorological conditions."

The FAA asked roundtable attendees for ideas on safety improvements, and some of the suggestions included: "more FAA involvement in sponsoring peer pilot programs to encourage greater participation; ensure FAA inspectors are trained consistently in applying the safety management system (SMS) rule; FAA-industry partnerships to improve SMS outreach; increased use of aircraft technology and simulation; evaluate how the FAA approves training simulators; expansion of the FAA's weather camera system; and expand instrument flight rule routes that allow helicopters to safely navigate at lower altitudes."

Finally, Rocheleau highlighted a new aviation rulemaking committee (ARC) formed to respond to a 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act requirement to improve commercial air tour safety.

"While we began this work months before the air tour helicopter crash in the Hudson River," he said, "that accident underscored that aviation safety is not static. There is always room for improvement."

The ARC's first meeting is planned for May 20, and its members will submit recommendations by late September.

"While flying remains the safest mode of transportation," he concluded, "we must always strive to do better. We have to identify trends and get smarter about how we use data. And when we put corrective actions in place, we must execute them."

FAA SAFO Warns Air Carriers of Visual Approach Risks- Agency stresses use of 'unable' when clearances reduce safety margins

(Source: Kerry Lynch, AIN, April 14, 2025)

Citing several recent "notable and high-visibility events," the FAA is urging air carriers and pilots to review available safety information, practice safety management system (SMS) principles, and examine their operational procedures to understand the risks associated with visual approaches.

In a new Safety Alert for Operators (SAFO 25001), the FAA said the severity of the events in recent months is concerning. "As the NAS continues to grow in use and complexity, efforts have been ongoing to prevent unsafe operations such as runway incursions, unstable approaches, altitude and route deviations, and runway identification errors," the agency said. "In light of recent events, the FAA identified the need to ensure all operators and pilots understand and evaluate the risks associated with the acceptance and execution of visual approaches."

The FAA issues SAFOs to highlight safety issues, usually to warn of a specific issue that has surfaced, such as suspected unapproved parts, GPS disruptions, or equipment anomalies. However, the FAA will issue broader SAFOs, such as 25001; in 2023, it issued an "Aviation Safety Call to Action," also citing several recent notable and high-visibility events.

In the most recent SAFO, the agency reminds that effective communication between pilots and air traffic controllers is essential to avoid collisions. "ATC supports the pilot-in-command's (PIC) authority to declare 'unable' when a clearance reduces the safety margin."

Reduced margins could surround vectors, speeds, or altitudes that increase pilot workload, such as unexpected vectors inside normal descent profiles and airspeed restrictions, the FAA said.

Other examples cited by the FAA include:

- Request to use a runway as a taxiway
- Use a shorter runway than expected
- Conduct land-and-hold-short operations
- Perform circling maneuvers associated with an instrument approach
- Maneuver at low altitudes on a visual approach
- Land with tailwinds or crosswinds that may increase risk to an unacceptable level
- Execute line-up-and-wait clearances
- Perform intersection takeoffs
- Follow runway exit instructions onto intersecting runways during the landing roll
- Make changes to departure, arrival, approach, or runway assignments
- Execute a visual approach

The FAA recommended that directors of operations, chief pilots, directors of training, check pilots, directors of safety, pilots, and other operational personnel review the SAFO and “take any necessary steps to ensure operations are conducted at the highest level of safety. Utilizing safety management system principles, certificate holders should evaluate changes to procedures or training to ensure PICs understand their authority for safe aircraft operation.”

Further, the agency advised using strategies to mitigate risks associated with complex operations, such as processes to ensure increased vigilance at airports with published VFR routes. The agency also suggested requesting an instrument approach to reduce the likelihood of misalignment with VFR traffic; communicating “unable” if there is not enough time to recalculate landing performance, reconfigure avionics, brief the new approach procedure, or stabilize the approach; and maintaining an active visual scan to avoid potential conflicts.

“Due to radar limitations, volume of traffic, controller workload, or communications frequency congestion, air traffic control may be unable to provide traffic information services,” the agency noted, further recommending: “Pilots should consider requesting information about other aircraft including azimuth in terms of the 12-hour clock, altitude, distance, type and direction of travel, or request radar vectors to avoid traffic conflicts.”

The FAA also reiterated that personnel should be encouraged to participate in voluntary reporting programs, apply SMS principles, evaluate risk mitigations, and review other safety information and SAFOs surrounding instrument and visual approaches and runway safety.

FAA Accelerates Critical Technology Upgrade

(Source: FAA, April 21, 2025)

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is accelerating the modernization of a critical safety system that alerts pilots and flight planners about airspace changes.

The FAA will deploy a new Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) service this year, much earlier than originally planned. The FAA used a streamlined, innovative vendor challenge to cut through red tape to get this critical work done as fast as possible.

“The Notice to Airmen system is deeply outdated and showing serious cracks,” said U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy. “Over the last few years, we’ve seen multiple system outages ground regional air travel, create extensive delays, and otherwise ruin the flying experience for the American people. It’s time our technology enters the 21st Century. NOTAM modernization is the first step as we work to deliver an all-new air traffic control system that makes air travel safer and more efficient.”

NOTAMs communicate temporary changes such as runway closures, airspace restrictions and obstructions, to pilots and flight planners. More than 4 million NOTAMs are issued annually.

The modernization will provide near-real-time data exchange, enabling efficient dataflows and better stakeholder collaboration. The system will be securely hosted in the cloud, and it will have a scalable and resilient architecture.

A major NOTAM system outage in January 2023 highlighted the fragility of the system and the need to speed up the modernization.

The FAA selected CGI Federal, Inc., to work on modernizing the NOTAM system and deploying the service.

CGI is currently on an accelerated schedule to deliver the NOTAM Modernization Service by July 2025, and the FAA is targeting deployment of the operational service by September 2025.

“Americans deserve the best aviation system in the world,” said Acting FAA Administrator Chris Rocheleau. “We worked with the best and brightest and came up with an accelerated approach to bring our technology into the 21st Century.”

Federal Aviation Administration

SAFETY MANAGER'S CORNER

PRISM SMS: Training and Safety Materials

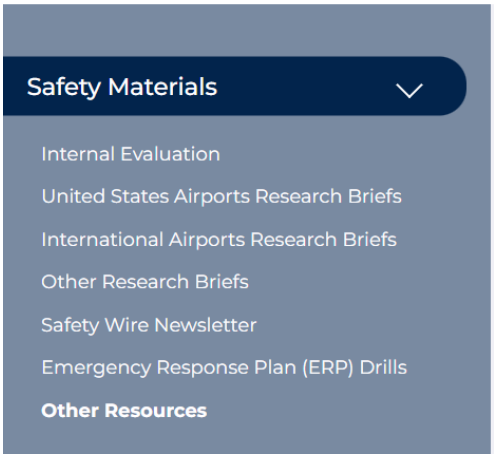
PRISM SMS has a plethora of training videos available under Training. The training materials are divided into three sections:

- **PRISM SMS Web Site Training & Resources** - these tutorials, presentations and handouts will help managers and employees navigate and learn how to use the PRISM SMS website on both desktop and mobile devices.
- **Employee Safety Training & Resources** - these resources are used to give employees more in-depth training and resources to help continue education about SMS and can be used to help the safety manager build a successful and sound SMS program.

- **Safety Manager Training & Resources** – from FAA Part 5 Tools and Resources to General Safety Management Resources, this section is built to support the safety manager.

In addition to Training, PRISM SMS has several resources available under Safety Materials such as:

- **PRISM Internal Evaluation Program (IEP) Checklists**
  - PRISM IEP Checklist Calendar
  - PDF copies of the PRISM IEP Checklists
- **Research Briefs**
  - Airports in the United States
  - International Airports
  - Other Research Topics
- **SafetyWire** (monthly newsletter)



- **ERP Drills** that range from tabletop to full drills and includes unannounced and announced drills
- **Other Resources**
  - NASA Callback
  - Information related to manuals
  - Helpful Links

PRISM continues to add and update the content in Safety Materials and Training. All of these resources can be used to promote your Safety Management System.

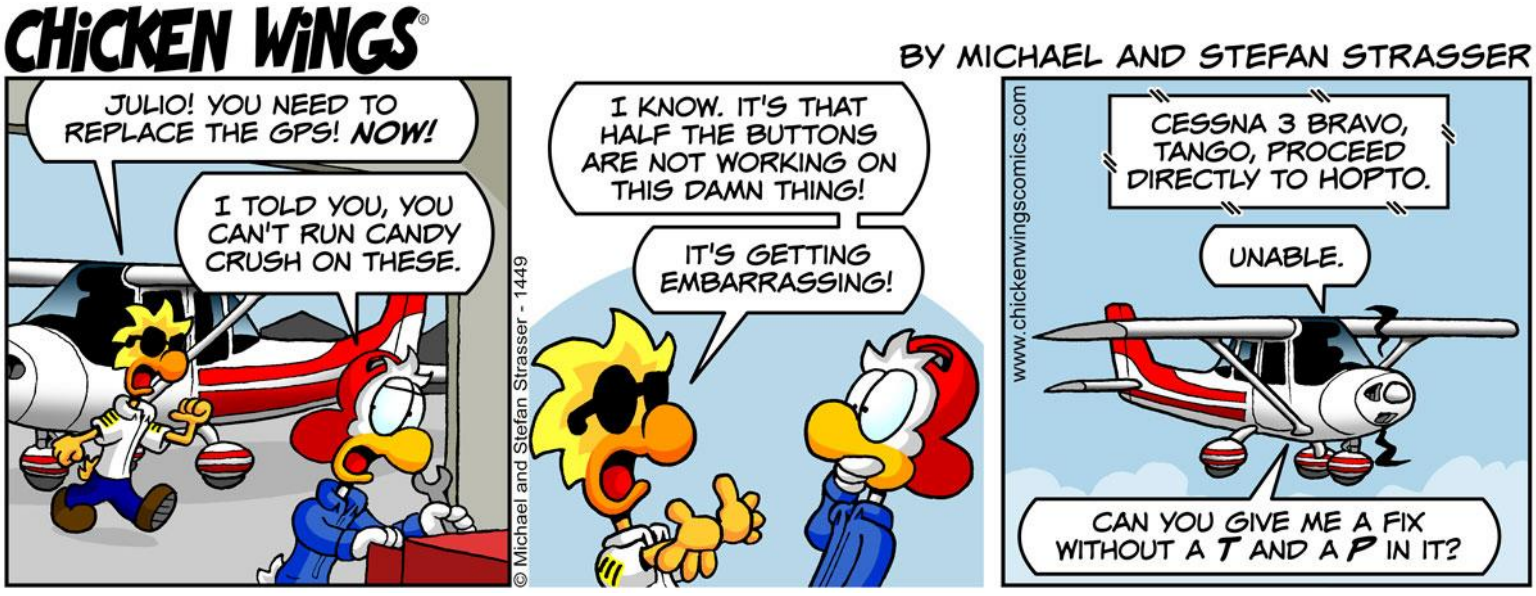
Quote of the Month

Strength does not come from winning. Your struggles develop your strengths. When you go through hardships and decide not to surrender, that is strength.

BY: Arnold Schwarzenegger

The Terminator's quote can mean different things to different people, so let's examine it from a safety perspective. Taking the extra step to manage risk usually isn't the easiest path to getting something done but it is the best path. Is it easier to skip the preflight checks or not bother with tool control? Absolutely it's easier, but we all know it's not right. Programs and procedures exist for really good reasons, and often are founded from serious repercussions related to past events. You may not know why a procedure or program exists but have the strength to follow it, every time. Does that imply questions can't be raised? Certainly it does not; do what is supposed to be done and assess effectiveness, then ask questions about how it can be improved. New ideas are the lifeblood of every operation, but they don't replace existing procedures on the fly. Use the safety management system as a tool to initiate improvement and follow procedures and programs to a "T." In other words, be strong.

On Short Final…



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July 21-25, 2025—PROS Course
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July 28-30, 2025—PROS Course
ICAT Training
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August 12-14, 2025—PROS Course
Airline Safety Management System (SMS)
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Go to Upcoming Training Classes to register.

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