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FSF Report Warns of Rising Mixed-use Airspace Risk – DCA midair collision underscores urgent need for action

(**Source:** Amy Wilder, AIN, February 25, 2026)

© FSF 2025 Flight Safety Report cover

The Flight Safety Foundation (FSF) has released its 2025 Safety Report, anchored by concerns about the dangers inherent in mixed-use airspace. FSF is warning that growing operational complexity and rising demand from traditional and nontraditional operators are putting pressure on the global safety ecosystem, and FSF is calling on industry stakeholders to take urgent, coordinated action to address systemic risk.

The report, based on data from FSF's Aviation Safety Network (ASN) database, found that airliners of all types were involved in 101 accidents worldwide in 2025, down 28% from 140 in 2024. Despite the decline in total accidents, commercial fatalities rose sharply. The 12 fatal accidents in 2025 (down from 15 the previous year) resulted in 420 deaths among passengers and crew and 33 more on the ground, compared with 268 passenger and crew fatalities and three ground fatalities in 2024.

Mixed-use airspace safety concerns were given sharp focus last year as a result of the Jan. 29, 2025, midair collision near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (KDCA) between a PSA Airlines Bombardier CRJ-701ER on approach to Runway 33, and a U.S. Army Sikorsky UH-60L Black Hawk.

"This is not a localized issue; it is a rising global safety challenge as aircraft in the military, commercial, general aviation, and rotorcraft sectors converge near high-density terminals alongside drones and similar new entrants," said Hassan Shahidi, FSF president and CEO, in a press release sent with the report. "Managing that convergence requires shared accountability: clear procedures, interoperable equipage, data-driven oversight, and decisive action on recurring risk signals."

Last year was the worst year for corporate jet fatal accidents in at least nine years, according to the ASN data. Corporate jets were involved in 34 accidents in 2025—up from 28 in 2024, which had been the best year since 2017—with 13 fatal accidents resulting in 57 deaths of both passengers and crew, and four people on the ground.

Three of the 13 fatal corporate aircraft accidents took place in the final two weeks of December alone, accounting for 25 of the year's passenger and crew fatalities in that category. The deadliest corporate jet accident of the year was the December 15 crash of a Cessna Citation III on approach to Toluca-Licenciado Adolfo López Mateos International Airport (MMTO) in Mexico, which killed both pilots and all eight passengers.

Of the 13 fatal business aviation accidents, four were due to loss of control in-flight (LOC-I), and four were runway excursions. Two were controlled flight into terrain (CFIT), and three were categorized as "unknown." Twenty of the 34 accidents occurred during the landing phase, with the remainder distributed across other phases of flight.

"While there was some improvement in 2025, runway excursions continue to be the most frequently cited ICAO occurrence category, which makes sense given that a significant majority of corporate jet accidents occur during the landing phase," the report states. Corporate jets were involved in 12 runway excursion accidents in 2025, four of them fatal, an improvement from the five-year average of 14.2 per year from 2020 through 2024, during which six of the 71 total runway excursion accidents were fatal. The worst year in that period was 2024, when corporate jets were involved in 16 such events.

After runway excursions, the next most commonly cited accident categories in 2025 were system component failure (non-powerplant) with six events; unknown, with five; and LOC-I with four. There were also two CFIT, two abnormal runway contact, and two undershoot/overshoot accidents. During the 2020 to 2024 period, LOC-I was the most lethal category for corporate jets, accounting for 15 of the 37 fatal accidents recorded over those five years.

The deadliest accident of the year was the June 12 crash of an Air India Boeing 787-8 shortly after takeoff from Ahmedabad International Airport (VAAH) in India. Of the 242 people on board, only one survived; 19 people on the ground also died. In November, a UPS McDonnell Douglas (Boeing) MD-11F went down shortly after takeoff from Louisville-Muhammad Ali International Airport (KSDF) in Kentucky when the left engine separated from the wing near rotation. All three crew members and 12 people on the ground were killed.

For the fourth consecutive year, turbulence led all ICAO occurrence categories in ASN airliner accident data, with 26 events in 2025, down from 35 in 2024, though still above the five-year average of 22.6 per year from 2020 through 2024. LOC-I accidents reversed a two-year downward trend, and there were four midair collision-related events in 2025, more than the combined total of three recorded over the prior five years, though only the DCA accident resulted in fatalities.

The report flagged a steady rise in thermal runaway events involving lithium-ion batteries carried aboard passenger aircraft, with 101 such incidents recorded in 2025, up from 83 in 2024 and well above the five-year average of 57.8 per year from 2020 through 2024. The Jan. 28 fire aboard an Air Busan Airbus A321, Flight BX391, at Busan-Gimhae International Airport in South Korea (RKPK)—in which the aircraft was destroyed after passengers evacuated via emergency slides—is believed to be the first passenger aircraft hull loss accident linked to a lithium-ion battery event. In 2025, power banks were associated with 34 such events, followed by e-cigarettes and cell phones, each at 23.

FSF “strongly encourages states and accident investigation authorities to conduct and complete ICAO Annex 13-compliant accident investigations for all accidents, and to make public the final investigative reports in a timely and transparent manner,” the report states, noting that final reports have been released for only about 58% of airline accidents from 2020 through 2024, and for just 41% of fatal accidents during that period. “Safety leadership, at the executive, managerial, and front-line levels, remains the decisive factor in converting known risk into sustained risk reduction,” the report states.

The foundation has launched an international task force to coordinate the development of a global action plan for the prevention of airborne conflict. “A system operating near its limits has less margin to absorb variability, disruptions, and surprises,” Shahidi said. “Safety improves when hazards are reported, analyzed, and acted upon, and when lessons learned are shared quickly enough to prevent the next occurrence.”

FSF identified three priority areas requiring urgent action: reducing risk in mixed-use airspace, particularly near busy terminal environments; strengthening system capacity and resilience to keep pace with demand and complexity; and restoring and reinforcing the global safety learning cycle through disciplined compliance, mature safety management systems, and transparent accident investigation and reporting aligned with ICAO standards.

It's OK to Stay: When Smart Decisions Define Mission Success

(**Source:** Chris Hill, Senior Director, Safety, Vertical Aviation International, USHST Winter 2026 Newsletter)

In aviation, we often talk about decision-making as if it happens in the moment. That could be when you are already strapped in and ready to crank, hovering over a landing zone, or staring through a windscreen at weather that slowly starts to deteriorate. In reality, many of the most consequential safety decisions are made well before the aircraft ever moves. They are shaped during preflight planning, expectation setting, and the conversations that define how pressure will be managed when conditions evolve.

That reality sits at the heart of Helicopter Safety Enhancement (H-SE) 2023-01: "Promote Conservative Go/No-Go Decision-Making," an initiative launched by the U.S. Helicopter Safety Team (USHST) on May 1, 2023. The goal was clearly ambitious: deliver meaningful, usable outputs within just one year – something that historically has been challenging for volunteer-driven safety efforts, no matter how well intentioned.

USHST recognized that success would require more than good ideas. It would require commitment, focus, and an industry champion willing to help move the work forward. That call was answered by the Vertical Aviation International (VAI) Safety Industry Advisory Council (IAC).

A Different Kind of Safety Effort

USHST H-SE initiatives have traditionally been long slogs, not due to lack of dedication, but because contributors must balance safety work with their primary responsibilities across industry, government, and operations. For H-SE 23-01, the USHST held off on formally launching the effort until they could be assured that a committed team one could stay the course and remain engaged over time and deliver.

The VAI Safety IAC accepted that challenge. While the nearly three-year effort ultimately took longer than originally envisioned, the final outcome reflects something far more important than speed: relevance. The team deliberately avoided creating yet another standalone product and instead focused on identifying, organizing, and connecting existing, proven resources that already support sound preflight decision-making.

The result is a practical body of work aimed at pilots, operators, and decision-makers; resources that help answer not just can we go, but should we, why, and how do we communicate that decision clearly and professionally.

Beyond “Conservative” Decisions

Despite the wording of H-SE, the objective was never to promote blanket conservatism or default “no-go” outcomes. Aviation doesn’t need more rigid rules; it needs smart, well-supported decisions. Decisions that are informed by data, experience, and context. Decisions that consider risk holistically, considering aircraft, crew, environment, mission, and external pressures. And decisions that can be clearly explained to customers, managers, and crews alike.

One of the recurring themes throughout this work has been communication. Too often, pilots receive extensive technical training but little guidance on how to communicate professionally with customers when conditions change. That gap creates friction, misunderstanding, and unnecessary pressure; to be fair – much of it self-induced. Managing risk effectively starts with managing expectations, and expectations are set through conversations long before the blades turn.

From Safety Enhancement to Safety Campaign

To demonstrate tangible support for H-SE 2023-01 and to make the outputs accessible, VAI is launching a new safety campaign in March 2026 called, “It’s OK to STAY.” The campaign is not about discouraging flights. It’s about reinforcing that mission success is defined by good judgment, not momentum, and that staying on the ground can be a professional, proactive decision.

The campaign will be formally launched on Wednesday, March 11th on the VERTICON Connect Stage under the title: “**It’s OK to Stay: Because Smart Decisions Define Mission Success – Presented by the VAI Safety IAC**”

Here is a description of the event:

Vertical Aviation International's Safety Industry Advisory Council (IAC) invites you to the official launch of It's OK to Stay, a new initiative built in partnership with the US Helicopter Safety Team (USHST) as part of an active Helicopter Safety Enhancement (H-SE) project.

It's OK to Stay challenges an outdated mindset in aviation: that success is measured only by taking off. Instead, this program promotes data-driven risk management, professional decision-making, effective communication, and creative problem-solving that keep both customers and crews safe and satisfied. Building on the success of the USHST's 56 Seconds to Live and VAI's Land & LIVE safety initiatives, this CONNECT Stage event introduces real-world stories, field-tested decision tools, and techniques for managing operational pressure without alienating customers or sacrificing mission outcomes.

Join the discussion and help shape a new standard for pilot professionalism—one where operational success integrates safety, service, and trust in every decision before takeoff."

This description captures the essence of the campaign: not new rules, but a reframing of professionalism; one that values communication, judgment, and trust as much as technical skill.

Turning Insight into Action

The It's OK to STAY campaign will be supported by a POWER UP magazine feature story and the March release in VAI's *Spotlight on Safety* including an article, poster, and video message from VAI President and CEO François Lassale. Together, these elements are designed to meet pilots and operators where they are; providing reminders, tools, and language they can use in real operational contexts.

Importantly, the campaign does not attempt to replace existing guidance or formal training. Instead, it complements them by reinforcing behaviors that experienced professionals already recognize: slow down, think clearly, communicate early, and resist pressure that erodes margins.

A Shared Safety Win

H-SE 23-01 represents a quiet but meaningful success. It demonstrates what is possible when a focused USHST team partners with an engaged industry advisory group to deliver practical outcomes. It also reinforces that safety enhancement doesn't always require new inventions; sometimes it requires better connection, visibility, and reinforcement of what already works.

The VAI Safety IAC is proud to join with the USHST to help bring this work to the broader community, but the credit ultimately belongs to the collaborative model that USHST continues to champion: industry-led, data-informed, and grounded in real operational experience.

Stay Engaged

The work of the U.S. Helicopter Safety Team continues across multiple active Helicopter Safety Enhancements. If you're interested in learning more about the USHST, supporting current efforts, or contributing to active or pending H-SE projects, you're encouraged to get involved.

To learn more, contact safety@ushst.org or stop by the USHST booth in the VAI Safety Zone at VERTICON (Booth B2815) on the show floor.

SAFETY MANAGER'S CORNER

Safety Management Systems (SMS) Training

Who Should Attend?

This training course is targeted for personnel at all levels involved in the day to day development, implementation, execution, management, oversight and evaluation of a Safety Management System operation.

Below are the remaining class dates for 2026. There will be a Welcome Reception the evening before each course begins:

1. April 22 – 23: Scottsdale AZ.
2. June 4 – 5: New York, NY.
3. Dec 2026: Boise, ID

Course Objectives

- Describe the 4 Components and the 12 Elements of the ICAO Framework which closely align with CFR Part 5.
- Become familiar with characteristics of an effective and "just" safety culture.
- Use and apply the Safety Risk Management process.
- Describe what Change Management is concerned with according to SMS.
- Become familiar with Safety Performance Indicators (SPI)
- Describe how to implement an Internal Evaluation Program (IEP) and where to find appropriate checklists
- Become familiar with Root Cause analysis.

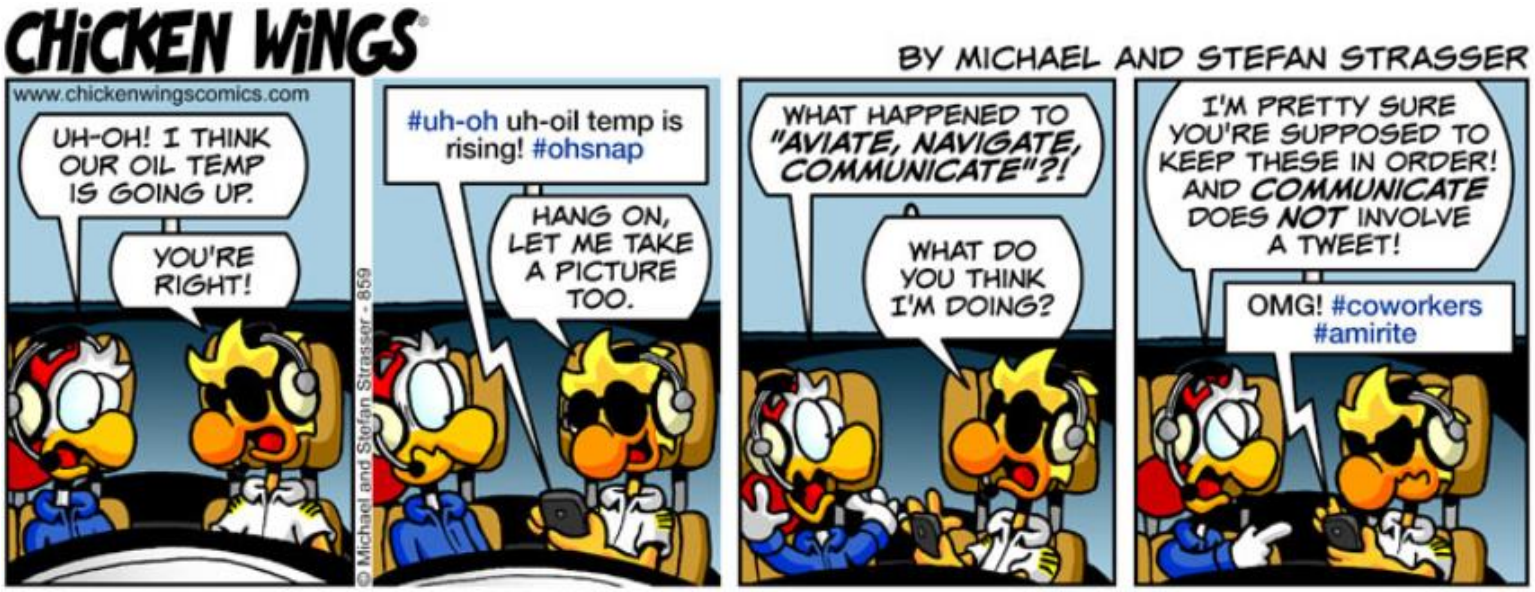
Quote of the Month

You know, I'm going to give you something free. That doesn't happen very often. Even when it's just good advice — I usually let other creatures learn by just suffering the consequences of their actions.

BY: Boba Fett

A somewhat harsh approach, perhaps suitable for a bounty hunter movie character, but not so terrific for an aviation operation. Learn by doing will always remain a primary means of education, but it shouldn't ever exist as the sole means of education. Today, so much data and information is available that the word "surprise" should come to mind less and less frequently each day. The opposite of surprise is aware, a perfect residence for the members of an aviation operation. Strive for a complete awareness of how your operation works, both the effective and the ineffective. Then look to sources of information to verify the effective and improve the ineffective. Strive for complete self-awareness; discover your strengths and weaknesses. Build upon the former and find ways to eradicate the latter. Learn how to avoid suffering and tell Boba to get lost.

CHiCKEN WiNGS



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UPCOMING COURSES

Mar 31-Apr 2, 2026—PROS Course
Virtual ALAT Training
Virtual

Apr 13-17, 2026—PROS Course
Aviation Auditor Training (AAT)
Denver, CO

Apr 20-22, 2026—PROS Course
Virtual ICAT Training
Virtual

Apr 22-23, 2026 -PRISM
SMS Training Course
Scottsdale, AZ

Apr 23-24, 2026—PROS Course
Risk-Based IOSA Training
Virtual

May 5-7, 2026—PROS Course
Virtual ALAT Training
Virtual

May 19-21, 2026—PROS Course
Airline Safety Management System (SMS)
Virtual

Jun 4-5, 2026 -PRISM
SMS Training Course
New York, NY

Go to Upcoming Training Classes to register.

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