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NEWSLETTER

August 2026 | Volume XXVI | Issue VIII

SAFETYWIRE



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Explaining the Unexplainable Pilot ‘Action Slips’ - Cognitive error during an automatic/routine task can turn deadly for aircraft crews

(Source: Stuart “Kipp” Lau, AIN, July 17, 2026)

On June 28, 2024, the first officer of a Boeing 777-200 unexpectedly responded to an automated V1 callout by retarding the thrust levers instead of moving his hands to the control column. He then briefly advanced the thrust levers before finally rejecting the takeoff.

Under normal conditions, V1 is the maximum speed during takeoff at which a pilot must initiate the first action to safely abort the takeoff within the accelerate-stop distance. After this point in the takeoff roll, the pilot is committed to flying.

At the time of the event, the aircraft weighed more than 546,000 pounds (40,000 pounds less than its mtow) with 13 crew and 334 passengers. According to flight data, the thrust levers were retarded first at 160 knots (V1) and again at 162 knots—the maximum speed during the takeoff roll was 167 knots. The aircraft came to a stop on the runway with 2,300 feet remaining. After a brake fire on the right side of the aircraft was extinguished, the aircraft was then towed to the gate. There were no injuries.

UK AAIB investigators found no obvious reason for the first officer’s actions. The “cognitive task analysis” of the report described the morning of the incident as “unremarkable” for the crew with no obvious distractions or workload issues.

In addition, the first officer was highly experienced on the Boeing 777. He had accumulated 6,156 hours total flight time and 2,700 hours on the aircraft type. Following the incident, the first officer stated that he was “well rested and feeling fine” and had “expressed surprise in himself over the inadvertent thrust reduction and could not identify a reason for it.”

Action Slips

Investigators concluded that the first officer’s incorrect actions were characterized as an “action slip,” which is defined as “an action which is not performed as intended and arises in routine or highly learned motor action sequences.” An action slip is an unintentional error in executing a planned action often occurring during routine or automatic tasks due to lapses in attention or habitual behavior.

Psychologist Donald Norman popularized the term in his 1988 book, “The Design of Everyday Things,” describing action slips as errors that occur while carrying out planned action sequences. These errors are not caused by a lack of knowledge or skill but by a temporary failure in attentional control or cognitive monitoring.

In aviation, the consequences of inadvertently executing the wrong action can lead to a serious incident or accident. In the case of the Boeing 777 inadvertent rejected takeoff, the report stated that given “the somewhat benign performance conditions,” the aircraft had stopped “some distance before the end of the runway surface.” A fast response from airport crash, fire, and rescue services quickly extinguished the resultant brake fire with no injuries reported.

Triggers and the Inappropriate Response: ‘Positive rate, Flaps Up?’

In another case, on July 16, 2018, the first officer of a Bombardier Dash 8-400 inadvertently raised the flaps instead of the landing gear after takeoff. Fortunately, the crew used a “normal takeoff power” for departure rather than a reduced power setting, and the performance of the aircraft masked the effects of the early flap retraction.

Investigators classified the event as human error, noting it was not unique to this operator. They suggested the flaps may have been retracted instead of the landing gear because both actions are expected during this phase of flight.

On Aug. 4, 2003, a Bombardier Learjet 35A crashed during a circling approach in Groton, Connecticut. Both pilots were killed. Flight data indicated that the aircraft was maneuvered at high bank angles (ranging from 60 to 90 degrees of bank) at altitudes below 500 feet agl. During its final turn, the first officer inadvertently retracted the flaps, causing the aircraft to stall and crash one-quarter mile from the airport.

NTSB determined that the probable cause of the accident was "the first officer's inadvertent retraction of the flaps during the low altitude maneuvering, which resulted in the inadvertent stall and subsequent in-flight collision with a residential home. Factors in the accident were the captain's decision to perform a low-altitude maneuver using excessive bank angle, the flight crew's inadequate coordination, and low clouds surrounding the airport."

Psychologists have identified three types of action slips:

- Capture errors: A more frequent or habitual action overrides a less familiar intended action. This occurs when the mind is preoccupied.
- Loss of activation: Forgetting to carry out a planned action entirely, such as driving home without stopping at the store as intended.
- Mode errors: Performing an action in one context but inappropriate in another, often seen in complex systems or interface use.

Before the inadvertent Boeing 777 rejected takeoff, the operator had already reviewed its standard operating procedures relating to movement of critical flight controls and found “that absence of cognitive thought and speed of execution [were] commonly featured during action slips.” Four days before the B777 event, the operator issued an “Operational Safety Notice” that stated, “Pause before execution and cognitively consider what the action is” before methodically executing the action and confirming it is correct.

Investigators concluded that preventing action slips remains an ongoing challenge for both operators and flight crews. The report noted that the B777 operator had issued guidance encouraging deliberate and methodical control selections, and had emphasized human factors in training and briefing materials. It also recommended that experienced pilots mentally rehearse the takeoff roll and other routine procedures.

FAA Safety Alert for Operators (SAFO) 26002- Data Preservation for Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR).

(Source: Federal Aviation Administration, July 1, 2026)

Purpose: This [SAFO](#) provides safety information to operators that have CVRs installed on their aircraft.

Background: On January 5, 2024, a B-737-9 operated by Alaska Airlines experienced an in-flight separation of the left mid exit door (MED) plug and rapid depressurization during climb after takeoff from Portland International Airport. One flight attendant and seven passengers received minor injuries; the captain, the first officer, three flight attendants, and 164 passengers were uninjured; and the airplane sustained substantial damage.

Discussion: The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigated the accident and, on July 10, 2025, proposed a number of safety recommendations (A-25-025) to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). The NTSB concluded that Alaska Airlines' procedures at the time of the accident were ineffective in ensuring that the CVR data from the accident flight were preserved, resulting in the loss of critical information for the investigation.

Among the recommendations is one for FAA to require operators of airplanes equipped with a CVR to incorporate guidance into company standard operating procedures, emergency protocols, and post incident and post-accident checklists. These materials would apply to both flightcrew and non-flightcrew personnel and would detail actions to preserve CVR recordings as soon as practical after completion of a flight with a reportable event.

Recommended Action: The FAA recommends that each operator who has a CVR installed confirm that company manuals contain instructions that the CVR circuit breaker be pulled after a reportable event. The instruction that the CVR circuit breaker is pulled could be included in flight operation manuals, maintenance manuals, and dispatch manuals, increasing the likelihood that the task is accomplished.

Certificate holders operating under Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR) parts 121 or 135 should use their safety assurance processes within their Safety Management System (SMS) to ensure the recommended risk controls are analyzed and assessed to meet the organization's safety objective. Those operators with an FAA voluntary SMS program are encouraged to conduct the same analysis and assessment.

Contact: Direct questions or comments regarding this SAFO to The Air Transportation Division's Air Carrier Operations branch at 9-AFS-200-Correspondence@faa.gov.

VAI Thanks Senator for Introducing Aviation Safety Bill - Proposed legislation aims to improve pilot awareness, hazard markings, and reports for low-altitude obstructions

(Source: Jeremy Kariuki, AIN, July 22, 2026)

VAI commended U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Oregon) for introducing the McCarty and Heideman Air Safety Enhancement Act in response to a fatal helicopter accident earlier this year. The low-altitude accident involved a helicopter striking a slackline, killing all four passengers.

According to the International Slackline Association (ISA), the FAA was notified of the slackline and a notam had been issued before the collision. There were no individuals on the slackline during the collision, but aviation markers were in place.

“Improving situational awareness is one of the most effective ways to reduce risk,” said VAI president and CEO François Lassale. “Pilots need timely, accurate, and accessible information about hazards in the airspace where they operate. VAI appreciates Sen. Merkley’s work to turn industry safety concerns into constructive legislation.”

The proposed legislation aims to enhance aviation safety by compelling the FAA to update regulations concerning low-altitude airspace hazards. Included in the legislation are proposed reviews of obstruction marking policies, notam improvements, and enhanced communication between the FAA and non-aviation entities.

“Sen. Merkley’s bill takes an important step toward improving safety for pilots, crews, passengers, and the communities they serve,” Lassale said. “The Arizona accident was a tragic reminder that temporary suspended obstructions create serious risks in the National Airspace System. This legislation focuses on practical steps to improve pilot awareness, strengthen hazard communication, and help prevent future accidents.”

SAFETY MANAGER'S CORNER

Why Safety Promotion?



Safety promotion is an important part of an SMS (one of the four pillars), setting the tone for the organization, and helping to build a robust safety culture while helping to achieve your safety objectives. Safety promotion also helps to foster improved safety performance by communicating lessons learned, broader safety information and the distribution of the safety policy as well as safety procedures in the organization. The promotion of safety must be recognized as a “core value” within an organization and its management team must always demonstrate its commitment to safety. Your success is directly proportional to the effort your managers put forth – there is no capacity for “lip service”. It goes well beyond simply handing out safety awards. Understanding the overall objective and how each employee’s role contributes in assuring hazards are identified, risks assessed and effective mitigations are developed and implemented are integral components in establishing a safety oriented culture.

Effective Safety Promotion in an organization includes:

- Promoting a Positive Safety Culture
- Management Involvement
- Personnel Competency and Training
- Communication

One of the easiest ways for managers to discuss the importance of safety on the job is through short safety briefings, or “toolbox talks”. You don’t have to be a professional speaker to do this well. These are typically done weekly, at the beginning of the workday or at a shift change. Keep the talk informal, limit the length of your discussion, invite your people to participate and encourage them to help suggest possible solutions to issues identified. Choose topics related to recent developments at your organization and pertinent to the work tasks your employees perform. You will find that these toolbox talks are an excellent method to engage your workers and identify (and resolve) real safety related issues within your organization.

Through safety promotion an organization adopts a culture that goes beyond merely avoiding accidents or reducing the number of incidents, although these are likely to be the most apparent measures of success. It is more to do the right thing at the right time in response to normal and emergency situations. Effective safety promotion sets the tone that predisposes both individual and organizational behavior and fills in the blank spaces in the organization’s policies, procedures and processes, providing a sense of purpose and direction.

Quote of the Month

Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.

BY: Ferris Bueller

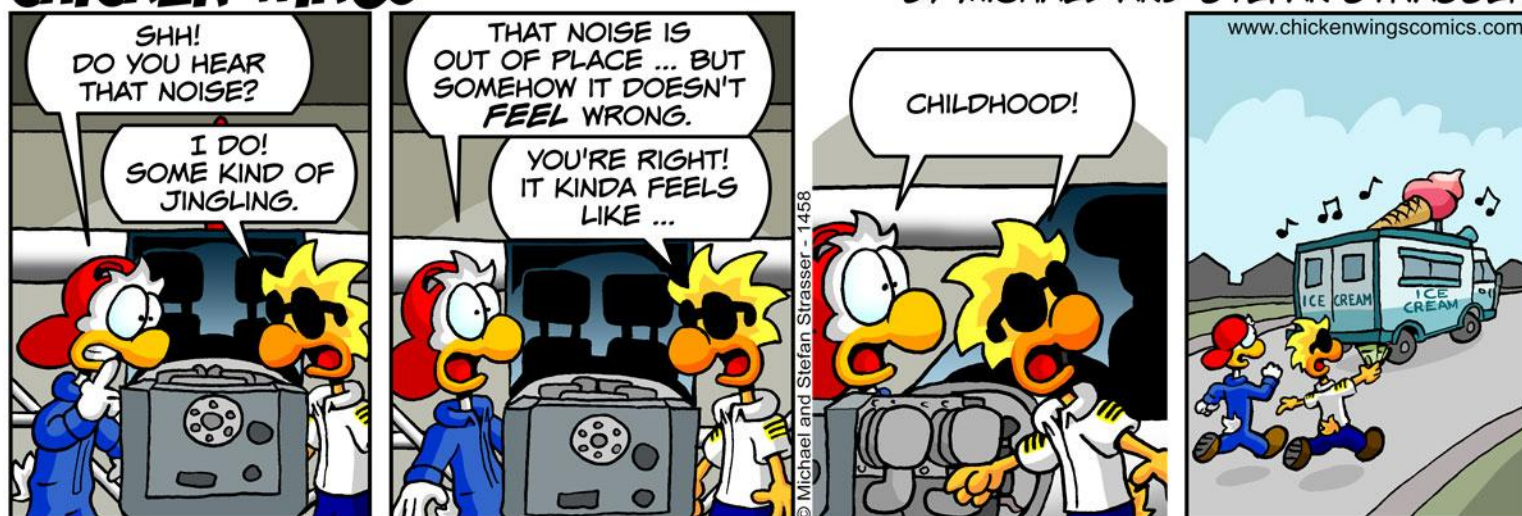


Observation and awareness, two words absolutely critical to success in any environment. It's easy to just flow along and stay inside oneself, expending little energy evaluating threats and risk. Aviation has no place for this type of approach, and in fact punishes it severely. Even momentary lapses can yield unfortunate or tragic results. Think of missed checklist or preflight items. Sometimes the result is minor inconvenience (returning to the airport after performing a takeoff with gear pins installed) and other times an absolute tragedy (missed checklist items cause a runway overrun and fiery crash). Staying on task and in role demands the highest levels of energy and concentration; simply put, it's just very hard. Have the discipline to stay task oriented and tightly focused. You'll be glad you didn't miss a thing.

CHICKEN WINGS

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Dallas, TX

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**Airline Safety Management System
(ASMS)**

Virtual

Sept 28-Oct 2, 2026—PROS Course

Aviation Auditor Training (AAT)

Virtual

Oct 27-29, 2026—PROS Course

Lead Aviation Auditor Training (LAAT)

Virtual

Nov 16-18, 2026—PROS Course

IOSA Conformance Auditor Training (ICAT)

Virtual

Nov 19-20, 2026—PROS Course

Risk-Based IOSA Training

Virtual

Dec 15-17, 2026—PROS Course

**Airline Safety Management System
(ASMS)**

Virtual

Go to [Upcoming Training Classes](#) to register.

