

Podcast Transcription

Fly by Night: Safety Committee June 2021

Captain Chris Lee My guests today are Captain Rich Hughey, Safety Committee Chairman, Captain Steve Heid, Safety Committee Vice Chairman, and Captain Jim Perry, Safety Committee Vice Chairman. Thanks for coming, guys.

Captain Rich Hughey Thank you.

Captain Chris Lee Rich, talk to the pilots about your duties as Safety Chairman.

Captain Rich Hughey We are essentially the voice for FedEx pilots on all matters of risk in flight operations. We represent the association through the joint safety programs that we have. We review system safety and provide operational expertise to support our FedEx pilots in their management of risk in flight operations. So that's a big picture view. We have a structure within our committee that accomplishes that, and we interface with the Company, other MEC committees at the ALPA FedEx level, and as well as groups and committees at the ALPA National level. That allows us a lot of access to both industry knowledge as well as FedEx specific knowledge in managing that risk for our FedEx pilots.

Captain Jim Perry To the average line pilot, we have your back, right. We're trying to use all our various technologies and we have courses up at MIT, we have ALPA National courses, we interface with check airmen and flex instructors, and we're using every piece of information we can ascertain to basically help prevent the next accident.

Captain Rich Hughey So there's a lot of stakeholders that we work with, obviously the MEC, Officers, other committees within the ALPA FedEx structure, specifically Training, Scheduling, Fatigue Risk Management and even Negotiations since we are in Section 6. We go up to ALPA National and talk to the President's Committee for Cargo, that was the old committee. It's now called the National Cargo Committee. It's a full-time committee. We work with Aviation Safety and Flight Time Duty Time Committee and the Engineering and Air Safety Department, all those staff that are up at ALPA National working for us. Occasionally, we do see an opportunity to engage at the international level with our International Federation of Airline Pilots Association, IFALPA.

Captain Chris Lee Are there any changes or areas where you're trying to make improvements in the safety committee?

Captain Rich Hughey So one of the changes we made to our Safety Committee about a year and a half ago was to separate the functions and programs of the Safety Committee into two groups. One is called the System Safety Group, and the other one's called the Safety Programs Group. The System Safety Group is run by Captain Jim Perry, Airbus Captain and LCA. The Safety Program Group is run by Captain Steve Heid, MD11 Captain. The Safety Program Group includes the programs of FOQA and ASAP and LOSA that are all governed by our MOUs and LOAs with the Company. Those are managed through Steve Heid. It is our desire to be able to have some cross-pollination, some crosstalk of safety knowledge between those groups. The System Safety Group is meant to be proactive in relation to the reactivate Safety Program Group, which is all after the fact. The System Safety Group is comprised of domicile safety teams and fleet safety teams. So anything that's not Memphis has a domicile safety team associated with it. We haven't staffed all of those positions yet, but we are. The fleet safety teams are with each

different aircraft types that we have. Usually, LCAs and SCAs are part of that group as well as our FOQA gatekeepers and what we want to do there is to start thinking proactively, initiate conversations with the company on some of the things we see or we observe and we think are important in regards to our pilots and the risk they see out in the system. And Jim Perry is running that show. It's probably the newest part of our safety programs so it's still under development. It all ties into our Accident Investigation Committee because some of those folks that are part of the trained group that will go in and do an accident investigation will also be part of our fleet and domicile safety teams.

Captain Chris Lee The Safety Committee deals with mitigating risks. Talk about that some.

Captain Rich Hughey Well, there's a lot of ways that we think through that. One of the ways to me, the best one is right to the FedEx pilot, because we are experts on managing risk. We do it every day. Our world of work is complex. It is very interdependent. It has a lot of tentacles that go a lot of different places that we need information from to do our jobs. And a lot of things are tightly coupled. In other words, if there's a delay in a sort or a maintenance issue with an airplane, our world is delayed. Our risk changes because of those things. We do that every day, 15,000 to 18,000 segments a month, and we do a wonderful job.

Captain Chris Lee This past year and a half, the FedEx pilots have been dealing with the COVID pandemic. How have you been mitigating those risks?

Captain Steve Heid One of the organizations we came up with during the last year was the COVID Safety Working Group (CSWG). Rich Hughey with this relationship with ALPA management, conversed with the Managing Director of Safety and they were looking for a way to mitigate the risk dealing with the COVID crisis as it began. And what we came up with was trying to get a working group between the duty officers and some subject matter experts on the ALPA side joining the resources of Insite reports and DARTs and then trying to highlight the highest risks in our system and try to mitigate those through management coming up with new procedures.

Captain Rich Hughey Yeah, so it was a collaborative effort, essentially, we put experts in the risk areas that we saw across the world that's associated with the pandemic and the reporting, which was the most important part from our FedEx pilots, because, you know, you can stovepipe ALPA and you could stovepipe the Company in two different reporting structures but if you're not talking to each other, you're not being very effective or efficient. So we put those two groups together that get the reports from our pilots and we said here are the problems we're hearing about the most or here are the problems that are most important to deal with and let's figure out a way to do that. And so it was a collaborative effort in managing both protection and production. The Company's really interested in production, continuing flight operations and maintaining our system form. We're most interested in protection, protecting our FedEx pilots, protecting any bad outcomes from occurring.

Captain Jim Perry I would add, what was interesting about the COVID working group was, we're a world hooked on Google, hooked on data. We all want a clear picture of the threat of the enemy and so on and early in COVID it really wasn't very clear. We didn't have a lot of data and we had to basically understand the threats with more of a rational model than a data model. And we did figure out what's the worst-case situation and so on. And I think we did a fairly decent job of managing risk based on potential bad outcomes

instead of waiting for a day to occur and measuring those outcomes, saying well we don't want to do that again. So I think, you know, the positive of that was it was more like and I liken it to people in the military intelligence preparation of the battlefield where you have first contact with the enemy and you're getting these spot reports of enemy contact and you really don't know how the enemy's going to maneuver. In this case, the enemy was a virus that didn't have a soul basically challenging us. And so how do we counteract that threat? Leadership is about acquiring information, getting big data, analyzing that data and making smart decisions. And we just didn't have all the data to do it. But I think we managed the risk pretty well.

Captain Steve Heid You know, I think one of the best ways we accumulated that data was through the Insite and the [DART reports](#) from the pilots out in the field. That was usually the quickest and most accurate information that we got. And when we can take that and combine it with the COVID Safety Working Group, I think they were able to make some good decisions.

Captain Chris Lee It's important for pilots to recognize that DART is a way to reach out and get in touch with you guys so you know what's happening actually on the front lines?

Captain Jim Perry Oh, it's huge. The challenge is and you know, the pilots are the King's eyes and ears of the organization. They're the ultimate sensor of what's going on. You know, we talk about safety management systems and this big feedback loops of whether it's ASAP, FOQA, Accident Investigation, all those are parts of our learning that we're learning about our systems and processes because we're really a bunch of imperfect people, an imperfect Company, an imperfect environment, trying to do perfect things, right. So we're always trying to get that feedback of what was not perfect and what we can learn from it and what we can improve. As far as the DART was concerned, that feedback loop was huge because out of all the threats we have, I think at FedEx and in general in aviation, it's error of omission where basically we decide not to convey the risk to the next person. You know, here's a heads up, this traffic light's dangerous in Memphis or whatever the threat is. It's incumbent upon all of us as line holders and FedEx crew members to make sure that we protect the next guy by always identifying the risk, communicating through DART or through management, however you want to communicate, but please, error of omission is saying leave that, you know, broken thing to the next guy, the potential hazard to the next guy and don't identify it. Don't move it on. Assume this is your child and what would you do to protect your child and if you manage risk that way, you realize we're all in this together and ultimately in a 30-40 year career you look back and say preventing the bad stuff from happening is an admirable thing.

Captain Chris Lee Well, you touched on it some, talk to the pilots about the safety programs that are in place.

Captain Rich Hughey Well, one of the things Jim was mentioning is the reporting structures and DART represents one of those. It is not necessarily tied to any one committee. So you can [submit a DART](#) to all our committees. The specific safety committees that take reports are ASAP and if we do a LOSA, when we do a LOSA, that would be a reporting structure through observation. That would allow the Association and the Company to look at that data that's in the report, those narratives and assess risk and then maybe even look in ASAP and look in FOQA about what's spoken about in LOSA. So if you think about those three programs, FOQA is an aircraft perspective, ASAP is a pilot perspective, and LOSA is a third-party observer perspective. And so the context of those

three interacting together and working together to identify risk and us to properly address it with the Company is the benefit of the safety programs that we do have.

Captain Jim Perry Exactly, and Rich let me add too that the ASAP, FOQA, and LOSA when we have LOSA is always about what has happened, all right. And so in any control system you want to know what has happened, what's happening, what's going to happen, kind of like situational awareness to build your shared mental model based on what has happened, what's happening, what's going to happen. And what's going to happen basically, that's what our domicile safety teams and our fleet working groups, the intent there is to hey, this change is occurring in the 757 fleet or this change is occurring in the MD11 fleet. And having that insight to what's the potential impact of that change and how does it affect our crew members from a risk standpoint, I think is part of that predictive quality of our shared mental models for our safety here.

Captain Rich Hughey We don't usually know what's happening without pilot input. We can surmise based on our own experiences, but it's not enough. We're not on the other side of the planet with you. So, we need to know what you see.

Captain Steve Heid I think everyone's familiar with the ASAP program, and that program was designed to improve safety through self-reporting. A lot of the data that we get at the ERC, the Event Review Committee, we would never know about if the pilots didn't tell us. And with that knowledge, the ERC can make recommendations to Training, to Ops, Maintenance, ramp procedures across the board based on the pilot observations that were received through the ERC. That's a pretty incredible power that we have as far as reporting. A lot of people don't know this or they don't understand, that FOM 2-15 has got required reports that you need to do if you have a certain event that happens on the airplane. It may not be clear on whether or not an ASAP report is sufficient and I just want to let you know that, yes, ASAP would cover the Flight Safety Report requirement.

Captain Chris Lee We're in contract negotiations right now. This might be a good time to talk about distractions and how distractions impact safety.

Captain Rich Hughey That is a great question. So the risks that are out in our system care nothing about Section 6 and that is all we really need to start with to develop the right framework for discussing what do we do while we're in Section 6. It's easy to talk about what's going on and what we want going forward. But in the here and now, manage what you're doing. If you're getting picked up at the hotel and you're looking at your iPad and your Flight Plan Release, stay focused there, put most of your effort there. As you get closer and closer to showtime and step to the airplane, refocused your efforts. Stay present. It's nice to talk about the future. It's easy to talk about the past, it's always 20/20, when you're looking backwards. It's very unclear when you're looking forward. Stay in the here and now,

Captain Jim Perry I think also mentally when you go to prepare to fly, think about the threats on approach and arrival. Think about the threats when you're departing. Think about the threats, brief the threats forward so that you get an open line of communication. If you have family stress, you have things going on outside of work, contract negotiations, you got to have enough discipline. You know, our pilots have great discipline, and I just ask you just brief the threats, think about threats first and focus on the job at hand.

Captain Steve Heid Yeah, if we learned anything in the past year, it's really got to be about compartmentalization. Going through COVID it seems like we spent most of our time

dealing with the different procedures going in and out of different countries, the disease itself, what's required and oh, by the way, we have to prepare for our flight. So, as COVID dies down, contract negotiations step up. I think the pilots had a warm-up, so they know now that they've got to focus on the task at hand like Rich said.

Captain Chris Lee Well, thanks for being here, and this is for all of you guys, any final thoughts?

Captain Jim Perry Culture's, everything. It's all about culture and building trust and having each other's back, knowing that you'll go to the ends of the earth with a guy next to you or gal next to you and having that trust. If you see something, think something, feel something, say something and you report any issue you think is a threat, you know, get it through a [DART system](#) and don't let error of omission, don't let your frustration get your guard down.

Captain Steve Heid I'd just like to end up by thanking everyone for this past year, anyone who's filled out an ASAP report, anybody who's done an Insite, anyone who's sent in a [DART](#). I just want to thank you because I know when things are going bad, the last thing you want to do is paperwork. But I can't tell you how much we appreciate it and that someone is on the other side and we're listening to you and we appreciate it.

Captain Rich Hughey I think our pilot group has really shaped a safety-minded culture over the last, I would say, two to three years. Our reporting has gone up. Our assessment of risk has gotten finer and better, even down to the individual level. Our understanding of what we're all aligned to try and accomplish, a safe operation of the airline and it has been evident in the amount of flying we've increased over the past 18 months, the absorption of all the external risk factors that happened during the pandemic and are still happening. And I think the resiliency and the adaptability of our FedEx pilots is pretty darn good. With that, I would say don't let your guard down, keep doing what you're doing.

Captain Chris Lee Thanks again for coming and thanks for listening. If you have any questions, please go to fdx.alpa.org and utilize the [DART](#) link and as always, be safe out there and we'll see you next time.