

Air safety: third-country aircrafts using Community airports, SAFA programme

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The Commission presents this third annual report on the EC SAFA Programme pursuant to the provisions of Directive 2004/36/EC. The report covers the period 01 January to 31 December 2008.

To recall, Directive 2004/36/EC on the safety of third-country aircraft using Community airports (the 'SAFA Directive') created a legal obligation upon EU Member States to perform ramp inspections upon third country aircraft landing at their airports, although the Directive does not in any way prohibit EU Member States from inspecting aircraft from other EU Member States. Including the EU-27, the EC-SAFA programme boasts a total of 42 participating States.

The main points dealt with in this report are as follows:

Development of the programme in 2008: the Commission adopted two important legislative measures aimed at further strengthening the EC SAFA Programme:

- Commission Directive 2008/49/EC containing the core elements of the SAFA Procedures Manual and providing for harmonised rules for the conduct of SAFA inspections including: follow-up actions, mandatory reporting timeframe (15 working days) and the mandatory communication of the results of the inspection to the inspected operators through the delivery of a Proof of Inspection according to a common format. In addition, the Directive introduces a common set of criteria for the qualification of SAFA inspectors;
- Commission Regulation (EC) No 351/2008 implementing a structured, pan- European approach to the prioritisation of SAFA ramp inspections on potentially unsafe subjects, aimed at fostering a better utilisation of the available inspecting resources. As required under Commission Directive 2008/49/EC, the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) has issued detailed Guidance Material for the qualification SAFA ramp inspectors setting standards which are common across all participating States.

A number of initiatives started in 2007 have continued in 2008, becoming regular standard activities under the EC SAFA Programme, such as the quality review of reports entered by participating States in the SAFA database and the database analysis. Conducted on a four-monthly basis, this analysis attempts to identify as early as possible potentially negative safety concerns and trends in order that they may be addressed in a timely manner before indeed becoming a threat to international aviation safety. In October 2008 a major upgrade of the SAFA database was deployed, allowing for improved reporting, support for monitoring of the prioritisation process (established under Commission Regulation (EC) No 351/2008) and improved workflows.

Introduction of a risk-based approach: Commission Regulation (EC) No 351/2008 introduces the concept of prioritisation of SAFA inspection from a pan-European perspective whereby participating States are required to prioritise a portion of their ramp inspections on certain subjects (either individual operators or all the operators certified in a certain state). The prioritisation list is compiled by the European Commission and updated whenever the need arises according to the set of criteria established under the said Regulation. The first prioritisation list was issued on 20 April 2008 and was subsequently reviewed twice during that same year. During 2008, out of a total 10,337 SAFA inspections 1,481 were conducted on subjects indicated in the prioritisation list.

Inspections: in 2008 the SAFA Participating States performed a record 10,337 inspections which revealed some 11,298 findings. The report describes the areas of inspection under the SAFA Directive and lists the states of operator, aircraft types and operators inspected during the year 2008. It highlights the wide coverage of the EC SAFA Programme and its non-discriminatory application. Out of the 10,337 inspections conducted during 2008, 9,040 were performed by EU Member States: 42.7% (3,857) were performed on operators certified in third (non-EU) countries while the remaining 57.3% (5,183) were conducted on EU operators. In 2008, third country operators performed some 700,000 landings in the Community airports implying an inspection rate of approximately 0.5% (i.e. 5 inspections for every 1,000 landings). Landings of EU operators in another EU state (other than the one responsible for their safety oversight) amounted to more than 2,900,000, implying an inspection rate of 0.17% for EU operators.

Findings: the report discusses the three categories of findings. A “Category 1” finding (minor); “Category 2” (significant finding) and “Category 3” (a major finding). For 2008, **18.46% of findings were category 3**. Operators from States in the EU, the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC) and Oceania have fewer findings per inspection than average. Operators from Africa, the Russian Federation /Belarus/Central Asia group, Asia, the Middle East, North America and North Africa have more findings per inspection than average. The five years evolution shows that the average number of findings (per inspection) has decreased for almost all geographic regions, most notably for operators licensed in the Russian Federation, Belarus and Central Asian states (CIS). The only exception is Latin America and Caribbean (LAC).

Action: the report describes the actions that may be taken after ramp inspection. In order to achieve best the objectives of the EC SAFA Programme, close cooperation with the Civil Aviation Authorities of all those States whose operators and aircraft have been subject of SAFA inspections is imperative. Out of 10,337 in 2008, there were 11,298 findings. There were 109 restrictions on aircraft operation, and 1407 corrective actions before flight authorisation. 14 aircraft were grounded and an immediate operating ban was introduced on 10 occasions. This number does not include bans/operational restrictions imposed by the EC pursuant to Regulation (EC) No 2111/2005.