

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

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This is the **fourth annual report** on the EU Safety Assessment of Foreign Aircraft (SAFA) programme covering the period 01 January to 31 December 2009.

Ever since its inception under the auspices of the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC) in association with the Joint Aviation Authorities (JAA) back in 1996, the SAFA programme has increasingly proven to be a vanguard in enhancing European, and indeed international, aviation safety.

Within the framework of the Community's overall strategy to establish and maintain a high uniform level of civil aviation safety in Europe, on 21 April 2004 the Community adopted Directive 2004/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the safety of third-country aircraft using Community airports (the so-called 'SAFA Directive'). This Directive introduced a legal obligation upon EU Member States to perform ramp inspections upon third country aircraft landing at their airports. In addition and following a decision by the Directors General of ECAC member states, the SAFA programme was transferred under European Community competence where as of 1 January 2007, responsibility for the management and further development of the EU SAFA programme falls upon the European Commission assisted by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). EASA is a European Commission agency based in Cologne which is responsible for the operational management of the EU SAFA programme. Until 2006 the operational elements of the SAFA programme were implemented by the Central Joint Aviation Authorities (CJAA). At the end of 2006 the SAFA coordination activities including the centralised database have been transferred from CJA A to EASA. The continued participation of the fifteen non-EU ECAC Member States, and thus the pan-European dimension of the programme, has been assured through the signature of a Working Arrangement between each of these individual States and EASA. Including the EU-27 therefore, the EU-SAFA programme boasts a total of 42 participating States.

This report constitutes a clear evidence of EU's efforts in making European skier safer. The main findings are as follows:

Progress of the programme during 2009: during 2009, efforts were also undertaken to **improve the functioning of the EU SAFA programme**, in particular through the: (i) issuing and publication of a second set of detailed Guidance Material on Ramp Inspection Procedures; (ii) continuation of a number of initiatives started in 2007, for example the database quality review of reports entered by participating States in the SAFA database and the database analysis; (iii) opening of negotiations with various aviation authorities around the world aiming at enlarging the participation in the EU SAFA programme while maintaining a high level of standardisation and harmonisation; (iv) starting a Standardisation programme to ensure that all SAFA inspections are done in a standardised manner in all SAFA participating States.

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 operators or all the operators certified in a certain state).

The prioritisation list is compiled by the European Commission and updated regularly whenever the need arises according to the set of criteria established under the said Regulation.

During 2009, out of a total 11 349 SAFA inspections, 2253 (19.85%) were conducted on subjects indicated in the prioritisation list.

Inspections: during 2009 a record number of inspections has been reached and covered a higher number of operators when compared to previous years. Out of 11 349 inspections, 9462 (83.4%) were performed by EU member states. 47.9% (5432) were performed on operators licensed in third countries while the remainder 52.1% (5917) were conducted on EU operators.

As a result, the programme has become a **better tool** to identify potential negative safety trends worldwide, contributing as well as in real-time to the safe operation of the inspected aircraft.

Inspection findings and their categories: the five years evolution shows that the average number of findings (per inspection) has **decreased** for all geographic regions:

- operators from States in the EU, ECAC and Oceania have fewer findings per inspection than average;
- for all regions the ratio Findings/Inspections shows an improvement. Although the ESAF region appears to have the largest improvement this is caused by the fact that more than half of the inspections on operators from this region were carried on the Angolan carrier TAAG (163 inspections). TAAG was included in 2007 in the Community list of banned carriers. In 2009 TAAG was allowed to partially restart the operations into the European Union (with specific aircraft and only to Lisbon, Portugal) under the condition that every flight should be inspected by the Portuguese authorities;
- the ratio Findings/Inspections shows the greatest improvement for the African region, although this is influenced by the very high number of inspections (163) on the Angolan carrier TAAG; those inspections were imposed after the partial removal of this carrier from the Community List of banned carriers;
- operators from States belonging to the EUR (European and North Atlantic) have fewer findings per inspection than average;
- operators from States belonging to the MID (Middle East), SAM (South America), WACAF (Western and Central Africa), NACC (North America, Central America and the Caribbean), APAC (Asian and Pacific) and ESAF (Eastern and Southern Africa) have more findings per inspection than average.

Actions taken pursuant to ramp inspections: based on the category, number and nature of the findings, several actions may be taken.

Out of 11 349 inspections carried out in 2009, the report notes 95 restrictions on aircraft operations, 1358 corrective actions before flight authorisation and 10 aircraft grounded as well as 1 immediate operating ban.