Fatigue

The Basics

As airlines restructure and cut corners to make ends meet, flight attendants are experiencing a new industry trend that must be put to rest. At many AFA carriers, flight attendants are being forced to work to the point of exhaustion because of poorly scheduled duty time, lengthened duty days due to concessionary bargaining, or flagrant company violations of flight attendants’ schedules.

The fatigue that more and more AFA members are experiencing on the job can affect our emergency and evacuation duties. In an era of heightened security with the need for constant vigilance, we cannot afford to be exhausted on the job.

In 1996, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) acknowledged that flight attendant fatigue could impact our job performance and implemented the Flight Attendant Duty and Rest requirements. Current FAA flight attendant rest rules require a minimum of 9 hours, which can be reduced to 8 hours if the following rest period is 10 hours. If, the “rest period” includes exiting the airport, local transportation to a rest facility (hotel), a meal, preparation for bed at night and then transportation back to the airport for the next duty day, perhaps the minimum rest period requirements need to be revisited.

FAA Issues Pilot Duty and Rest Regulations – December 2011

On Wednesday, December 21, 2011, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) announced the long-awaited Pilot Duty and Rest Requirements that changes the way commercial passenger airline pilots are scheduled to address pilot fatigue. One of the key components in the rule includes an increased rest period of a minimum of 10 hours that may not be reduced. The Pilot Fatigue Rule will take effect in two years to allow passenger airline operators time to transition. Read highlights from these new regulations on the FAA website.

AFA believes that now that the pilot rule is done, it is imperative that the FAA initiate rulemaking to address Flight Attendant fatigue. As the FAA states in the pilot final rule, its incremental approach contemplates “future rulemaking initiatives [that] may address fatigue concerns related to flight attendants, maintenance personnel, and dispatchers.” As noted below in the FAA Flight Attendant Fatigue Studies section, there is a sound, scientific basis for demanding similar increased protections from fatigue for flight attendants.

AFA will continue to strive for contract provisions that protect Flight Attendants from fatigue and to defend the right of Flight Attendants to call in fatigued without discipline.

FAA Flight Attendant Fatigue Studies (updated Sept 2012)

The FY ’05 Omnibus Appropriations contained an appropriation for $200,000 directing the FAA to conduct a study of flight attendant fatigue. Due to short internal FAA deadlines for conducting the report, the researchers were unable to conduct a thorough and comprehensive study of flight attendant fatigue. The 2005 report primarily consisted of a review of existing literature on the issue, an evaluation of flight attendant duty schedules and a comparison of those schedules to the current regulations regarding rest. Based just on that limited research, the report concluded that flight attendants are “experiencing fatigue and tiredness and as such, [it] is a salient issue warranting further evaluation.” They also stated that “not all the information needed could be acquired to gain a complete understanding of the phenomenon/problem of flight attendant fatigue” and therefore recommended follow-on research.

Follow-on research began in 2007 and resulted in six additional reports. A description of the six studies and an overview on each study follows.

Part I: National Duty, Rest, and Fatigue Survey. This survey report addressed 7 main operational factors that may contribute to flight attendant fatigue: work background, workload and duty time, sleep, health, fatigue, work environment, and general demographics.

- Data was collected from 9,180 flight attendants representing 30 operators.
- Responses indicated that flight attendants had experienced fatigue (84%) and the majority felt flight attendant fatigue was a safety risk.
- Two of the primary contributors to fatigue were scheduling and physiological requirements.

Part II: Flight Attendant Work/Rest Patterns, Alertness, and Performance Assessment. This study
explored the physiological and psychological effects of fatigue, sleepiness, circadian factors and rest schedules on flight attendants’ ability to perform their duties over a 3-4 week period of 202 flight attendants.

- On average, flight attendants slept 6.3 hours on days off and 5.7 hours on work days. Those working international operations slept less and less efficiently compared to domestic flight attendants. All flight attendants exhibited significant impairments during pre-work testing.

- This study supports the subjective data from Part I that noted that flight attendants felt that fatigue was a common problem and that it is a pervasive condition across the flight attendant community. In fact, it appears that chronic sleep restrictions and fatigue are considerably worse than the flight attendant perceptions noted in Part I.

**Part III. Validation of Fatigue Models.** This will help ensure that model predictions are consistent with data gathered from flight attendants during the field operations be scheduled.

- A total of 202 flight attendants participated in a study to evaluate the predictive validity of the SAFTE (Sleep, Activity, Fatigue, and Task Effectiveness) model. The study used actual sleep/wake/work data to demonstrate clear relationships between performance effectiveness predicted by the SAFTE model and objective performance outcomes in the field. This Part has yet to be published.

**Part IV: Analysis of Incident Reports.** The FAA CAMI reviewed and analyzed the content from 2,628 reports found in the NASA ASRS database related to flight attendant fatigue in order to identify the frequency and conditions of fatigue noted in the reports.

- The narratives in the reports mirror the findings in the other parts of this study in that flight attendant fatigue is a salient issue and there should be scheduling based on science and that in addition some type of training should be supplied to the flight attendants.

**Part V: A Comparative Study of International Flight Attendant Fatigue Regulations and Collective Bargaining Agreements.** CAMI personnel obtained and analyzed 38 regulations and 13 collective bargaining agreements from around the world.

- When comparing U.S. maximum hours of work and minimum hours of rest with other countries the U.S. prescriptive rules were the least restrictive.

- The study recommends establishing a flight attendant fatigue work group of subject matter experts to evaluate the current regulations, 14 CFR 121.467 and 135.273, for possible revision.

**Part VI: Fatigue Countermeasure Training and Potential Benefits.** Education about the dangers of fatigue, causes of sleepiness, importance of sleep and proper sleep hygiene is a tool that can assist with mitigating fatigue if used with other risk mitigation tools like scheduling.

- CAMI personnel reviewed 50 training programs from diverse workgroups and identified the critical components of a fatigue countermeasures training program and the study recommended that airlines implement a training using some of the suggested components as well as integrating the training into a broader program that addresses fatigue risk management strategies.

- The survey noted that 35% of flight attendants surveyed were provided some type of training or material on fatigue; however, almost 80% indicated the training did not help reduce or minimize fatigue.

**Flight Attendant Fatigue: A Quantitative Review of Flight Attendant Comments.** This analysis study was conducted to provide a quantitative review of some of the comments and surveys results in the Congressional studies above. It can be used as a supplement to help interpret the published surveys.

- This analysis corroborates and emphasizes that the results of the national survey of flight attendant fatigue found that long duty hours, consecutive duty days, length of layovers, long delays, breaks and nutrition were concerns for flight attendants.

- Overall, the results from the survey and the content analysis of reported comments indicate that fatigue is an issue of significant concern in flight attendant operations.

**AFA Activity and Hot Topics**


**Testimony** of Pat Friend, AFA-CWA International President, to the Subcommittee on Aviation of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, June 6, 2007

**MORE INFORMATION**

**NTSB Safety Recommendation A-99-45:** Three safety recommendations regarding fatigue in aviation, issued in 1999