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December 21, 2011

New rule seeks to prevent pilot fatigue

Today, the Federal Aviation Administration is announcing a landmark achievement in aviation safety, a new rule that guarantees our commercial pilots the opportunity for proper rest before climbing into the cockpit.

One of my worst days in this job was February 12, 2009, when Colgan Air Flight 3407 crashed outside Buffalo. During the days and weeks that followed, I met with the families of the 49 passengers and crew on board. And I gave them my word that we would redouble our [commitment to aviation safety](#).

Among other immediate steps, we issued a call to action in the aviation community. We held dozens of safety forums in cities across the country. The airlines took a number of actions on their own initiative.



And, in September 2010, we proposed a major new safety measure to deal with the longstanding challenge of pilot fatigue. Today, the regulations that developed from that proposal [become the law](#) of the land.

The new rule incorporates the latest fatigue science to set different requirements for pilot flight time, duty period, and rest based on the time of day pilots begin their first flight, the number of scheduled flight segments, and the number of time zones they cross.

It includes the following key elements:

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Ray LaHood

We made a promise to the traveling public to do everything we could to make sure pilots were rested and ready to go before

Flight time limits of eight or nine hours. The FAA limits flight time to eight or nine hours depending on the start time of the pilot's entire duty period.

10-hour minimum rest period. The rule sets a 10-hour minimum rest period prior to the flight duty period, a two-hour increase over the previous rules. The new rule also mandates that a pilot has an opportunity for eight hours of uninterrupted sleep within the 10-hour rest period.

Cumulative duty and flight time limits. The new rule addresses potential cumulative fatigue by placing weekly and 28-day limits on actual flight time and the amount of time a pilot may be assigned any type of flight duty. It also requires that pilots have at least 30 consecutive hours free from duty on a weekly basis, a 25 percent increase over the previous rules.

Fitness for duty. The FAA expects pilots and airlines to take joint responsibility when considering if a pilot is fit for duty, including fatigue resulting from pre-duty activities such as commuting. If a pilot reports they are fatigued, the airline must remove that pilot from duty immediately.

Fatigue Risk Management System. An airline may develop an alternative way of mitigating fatigue based on science and data validated by the FAA. Such a program must be monitored by the FAA.

We made a promise to the traveling public to do everything we could to make sure pilots were rested and ready to go before heading into the cockpit. Today, with this new FAA rule, we're taking a major step toward fulfilling that promise and keeping air travelers safe.

For more information on the new rule, please read the FAA Fact Sheet.

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