

April 5, 2013

The Honorable Deborah A. P. Hersman  
Chairman  
National Transportation Safety Board  
490 L'Enfant Plaza, SW  
Washington, DC 20594

Dear Chairman Hersman,

Recently, the NTSB held a Board meeting titled "General Aviation Safety Issues." The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) shares the view that as long as there are general aviation accidents, we must all work to improve safety. When a fatal accident occurs we not only lose a member, but often times a friend, a family member, or a loved one.

As you are aware, AOPA's Air Safety Institute (ASI) has been the leader in safety education for the general aviation (GA) community for more than 55 years. In fact, ASI products reached GA pilots nearly 1.8 million times in 2012 with online training, live seminars, publications, and videos. Educating pilots and providing safety information and training is a fundamental part of what we do.

Aviation safety metrics are the compass in which we assess how we are doing. The number of GA fatalities has decreased for the last several years. According to NTSB data, the fatal GA accident rate for 2011 was 1.17, nearly matching the twenty-year low of 1.16 reported in 1999. Furthermore, in 1992, there were a total of 2,110 GA accidents, 866 fatalities, 8.51 accidents and 1.81 fatal accidents per 100,000 hours flown. Using NTSB's most current data, 2011, there were 1,466 total accidents, 444 fatalities, 6.51 accidents and 1.17 fatal accidents per 100,000 hours flown. By those parameters, the safety of GA has significantly improved but we recognize we can do better.

We believe that by furthering the collaborative work between AOPA and NTSB, we will continue to positively affect GA safety and further reduce fatalities. To that end, we would like to meet with the Board again to offer suggestions regarding the implementation of the three-part process you presented during the recent meeting.

The three items you identified as priorities in your process to improve general aviation safety included: obtaining a better understanding of the cause of accidents; identifying preventative strategies; and getting the word out to the GA community. We have several observations and suggestions regarding the execution of these steps.

First, we realize the NTSB's resources are limited, but we would like to better understand the decision-making process the NTSB uses in determining which general aviation accidents to investigate. We understand the NTSB sends investigators to about 15 percent of GA accidents, and we would like to explore ways to expand the number of on-site investigations conducted and also to discuss whether there are ways to expedite the timeliness at which the findings are made public.

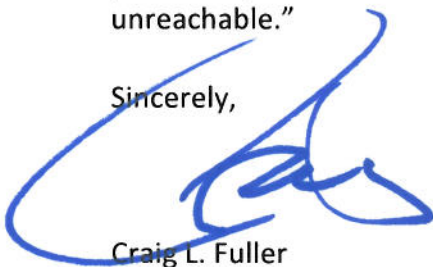
Second, the FAA and industry have made significant efforts in the move to a data-driven approach to accident analysis and prevention through the work of the General Aviation Joint Steering Committee (GAJSC). Through a more detailed and complete accident investigation, similar to that of a high-profile GA or commercial accident, the GAJSC's work will be enhanced and result in a better understanding of the pilot's decision making process. This increased focus on investigating accidents along with providing more comprehensive and quicker findings will dovetail with the work being done on the GAJSC.

Third, given the preeminent role that education and training can play in accident prevention, we want to do everything we can to also help the NTSB achieve its third goal of informing the community. Two of ASI's new videos were produced in response to NTSB safety recommendations, and the Board characterized ASI as "exceeding" those recommendations in the passenger safety video that was produced last October. In the next meeting, we would also like to discuss with you other safety education initiatives AOPA has underway and explore ways in which we can further cooperation in this area.

Finally, we are also deeply concerned that AOPA and NTSB safety initiatives already underway are occurring against the backdrop of a series of budget cuts proposed by the Administration. These cuts are aimed squarely at general aviation and will categorically undermine safety. The FAA's decision to close 149 air traffic control towers at airports primarily serving general aviation and the potential decommissioning of navigation aids will compromise safety. NTSB's voice on the negative implications on cuts such as these could be of critical importance in the months ahead.

We look forward to continuing this dialog to improve the safety of aviation. Through a solid partnership and affiliation will we hopefully begin to "move the needle" and finally "reach the unreachable."

Sincerely,



Craig L. Fuller