CHIRP Cabin Crew FEEDBACK

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COMPANY SICKNESS POLICIES AND PRESSURE TO REPORT FIT FOR DUTY

Over the past year, we have received a number of reports from both flight crew and cabin crew about company sickness policies and pressure on crew members to report fit to operate when they are not.

In several of the reports submitted by cabin crew, reporters have stated that they have not been well enough to operate (in some cases not well enough to return to work after a period of sickness) but that they have chosen to operate because they have been worried about their previous absence record or the financial implications of taking time off. This is very worrying because not only are they putting themselves at risk, but also their fellow crew members and passengers too. It is the individual crew member's responsibility to report fit for duty and only they can assess this. If a crew member is unwell, they should not report fit for duty.

We have received a number of reports from cabin crew regarding a recent change to a company's sickness policy. These have been disidentified and passed to the operator in question and the CAA to ensure that both are aware of the concerns that have been raised about the policy through CHIRP reports. However, it is very important that all concerns relating to a company sickness policy are reported directly to the company to enable accurate trend analysis to be completed by the company and for policy review.

Since operators do not wish to have flights operated by crew members who are unfit, they might welcome the opportunity to use an independently-developed Absence Management Policy that would discourage inappropriate absences while accommodating the specialised needs of flying crew; a Policy which is fair to employers and employees alike.

The UK Flight Safety Committee will be leading a project to develop best practice protocols for absence management that operators can adopt or adapt. There is no defined timeframe for this study but the work, which will have the support of the Department for Transport, will require input from industry, HR and aviation medicine specialists, lawyers, flight crew, cabin crew and trade unions; it is hoped that AOC holders will actively participate and share good practice where it already exists. The CAA will be asked to endorse the results, which will be made available to all operators. It is also good news that the first reaction from operators who have been contacted with a view to supporting this very important project has been positive.

Stephanie Dykes
Cabin Crew Programme Manager
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SEATBELT DESIGN AND FITTING

Report Text: The seats on both sides of the aisle have the seatbelts with the big metal buckle on the aisle side and if they hang over the seat edge they become a trip hazard.

I was wondering if that was legal because I think they should be attached the other way round, with the buckle side towards the window side.

CHIRP **Comment:** A previous CAA certification determined that aircraft seatbelts should have the buckle fitted on the right-hand side, with the buckle flap requiring a 90 degree lift before release. However, with the introduction of EASA regulations, this is no longer a requirement.

This report was referred to the operator for comment, who advised that there had been no trend identified in recent reports submitted to the company to suggest that this was a reoccurring issue. Incident reports should be submitted directly to the company when this problem is observed so that future reports can be monitored for trends.

CABIN BAGGAGE STOWED IN AN UNAPPROVED STOWAGE TO ACHIEVE AN ON-TIME DEPARTURE

Report Text: This event happened during boarding. I was working at the front of the aircraft with the SCCM. We struggled to find space for the bags, so in order to achieve an on-time departure, the SCCM decided to put 2 heavy wheelie bags in the wardrobe at the front of the cabin. I told him I wasn't happy about it as I was seated just opposite and if anything happens, my safety would be compromised.

We have a really strict rule not to put bags in a wardrobe as they're not built to cope with that, it's a wardrobe, not a locker. But the company also put a lot of pressure on the crew and the despatchers to achieve an on-time departure so sometimes the safety is compromised.

I think is really important for them to understand that the safety of their crew is more important than achieving an on time departure. Those bags should have be put in the hold but neither the SCCM nor the dispatcher wanted to delay the flight a few minutes, so they went for the easy option...

Lessons Learned - As I said above, if delaying the flight a few minutes mean making your crew safe, so be it...

CHIRP **Comment:** Excess cabin baggage has been an issue for several UK operators over recent years. Each operator has their own restrictions in place, with all ground staff and cabin crew aware of what each passenger is permitted to carry on to the aircraft. Passengers are notified at the time of booking what their baggage allowance is and they are expected to adhere to these restrictions. Ground staff at the gate are expected to monitor cabin baggage during the boarding process – especially when they are aware that the flight is busy - to ensure that large items of baggage that may not be able to be stowed in the cabin are checked-in to the hold. We have received a number of reports on this subject and in most cases, the ground staff have been pro-active and tagged as many bags as necessary for the hold.

Passenger cabin baggage should only be stowed in approved stowages, which includes the overhead lockers and underneath the seat in front – except for passengers seated at an emergency exit row, when bags must be stowed in the overhead lockers. Cabin baggage should never be stowed in places that are not approved for this purpose, e.g. in the flight deck or crew rest areas. Some aircraft are also fitted with a cupboard or wardrobe in which cabin baggage can be safely stowed. Each cupboard will have a placard inside detailing the maximum weight restriction and if bags and any other contents are within the weight limit, then it is possible to use it for stowage of these items.

The reporter has made a good point in their 'Lessons Learned'; in that safety should always come before an on-time departure. If colleagues have stowed bags in unapproved stowages in order to achieve an on-time departure, they need to be reminded that this is not permitted and that the bags should be placed in the hold. The Captain should be told about what has occurred which can then be recorded via the flight log.

The crew member was correct to raise this issue with the SCCM; they also advised a manager of what had occurred on landing back at base. The crew member has been reminded to ensure that all events where cabin baggage has been stowed in an unapproved stowage should be reported directly to the company for further investigating and monitoring purposes.

CREW USING MOBILE PHONES DURING TAXI

Report Text: It seems that on most flights cabin crew are on their mobile phones at every opportune moment before the aircraft departs. On a few occasions, I've had to remind crew to turn their phones off whilst we are taxiing out to the runway, be it at base or when we are down route. I think it's totally unacceptable.

CHIRP **Comment:** Taxi, take-off and landing are classed as critical phases of flight, therefore cabin crew should not be using personal mobile phones during this time. There can be all sorts of personal circumstances that make it difficult to wait and where it is tempting to send a text message or make a quick call but colleagues using their phones inappropriately should be reminded at the time to abide by the rules. During the critical phases of flight, cabin crew members should be focused on the tasks ahead and be ready to act should an emergency situation arise.

If an operational task requires it, cabin crew can use an electronic device such as an IPad or tablet during taxi, take-off and landing. This could be to check passenger loads or to read PAs. The company Operations Manual will specify when the use of personal mobile phones or other electronic devices is permitted and should be adhered to.

The operator concerned has been notified of this report and the cabin crew member has been asked to ensure that any event where a crew member is using their personal mobile phone or other electronic device during a critical phase of flight, be reported directly to the company or to their personal manager for further investigation.

COMPLIANCE WITH CABIN CREW INFLIGHT REST

Report Text: I have just returned from a long-haul trip where EASA FTL stipulates 2 hours 15 minutes rest, but we were given only 1 hour 50 minutes. This was queried by several crew with the SCCM, who seemed under the impression that the lesser time was sufficient, with a whole 2 hours being subsequently required to complete the service before landing. The Captain claimed that the 2 hours 15 was a Union agreement (not an EASA requirement), which is rather concerning considering all flying crew (including pilots) cover EASA regulations (including FTLs) during annual recurrent SEP training.

Lessons Learned - SCCMs and Pilots need to be made aware of the need to comply with EASA requirements for FTLs, which may involve a rethink of some of the more time consuming aspects of the service to achieve adequate rest periods.

CHIRP **Comment:** The operator confirmed that the length of the flight in question required the cabin crew to take 2 hours 15 minutes of Class 1 bunk rest during the flight. Their rest requirements should have taken priority over the passenger service and not have been reduced. The flight crew have access to EASA FTL inflight rest requirements and were incorrect when they advised the cabin crew that it was a Union agreement. The cabin crew operating would also have had access to the Union agreement, which could have been shown to the flight crew either at the time or after the flight had landed back at base.

In this reported case, an incident report was not submitted to the company after the event had occurred. The cabin crew member asked CHIRP not to pass the flight details on to the company as they were worried that their identity could be inferred and that they may be penalised for not reporting the event directly to the company. It is worth noting, that some operators also provide a confidential reporting system for their staff, which can be used by those who wish to remain anonymous to the company. Concerns can also be raised with the Union representatives who can then discuss the issues with the company, without referring to a specific occurrence.

PRE-FLIGHT BRIEFING PROCEDURES

Report Text: I was asked by a manager not to conduct a full pre-flight briefing in private due to the late arrival of my previous flight. A new crew member was joining us for the flight and I was asked to brief them en route to the aircraft in a public area. I questioned this due to the sensitive nature of the briefing content especially security.

I've checked SOPs and can't find this written down anywhere. For me, a private briefing with the whole crew is essential to create good CRM for the safe and secure operation of the aircraft. I also contacted the Trade Union to check this and they said it was acceptable to brief the crew in public en route to the aircraft.

Lessons Learned - To challenge non-compliance of SOPs.

CHIRP **Comment:** EASA regulations do not specify how an operator should conduct pre-flight briefings; this is determined by the operator. On referring the report to the operator for comment, CHIRP was advised that company procedure states 'the SCCM must ensure that cabin crew who missed the pre-flight briefing display an adequate knowledge of SEP, current operations manual notices and any other information pertinent to the flight'. Briefing a crew member on the way to the aircraft is not standard company procedure but in situations as described above, this would be deemed acceptable by the company. The SCCM conducting the briefing should however be mindful of any security discussions held with the joining cabin crew member and where they take place.

The crew member was correct to question the practice if they were not sure where it was written in the manual, as it is always better to ask questions if you are unsure.

PASSENGERS AT THE OVERWING EXIT DID NOT RECEIVE A BRIEFING

Report Text: The crew member did not brief the overwing exit passengers which is required prior to departure. Passengers seated in the overwing exits were not seated during the safety demonstration. When the SCCM secured the cabin, there were many bags still under the seats at the overwing exits.

As a cabin crew with the same airline, I am aware of the safety procedures which must be followed prior to departure however these procedures were ignored by the crew on this flight.

CHIRP **Comment:** Overwing exits are primarily self-help exits where the passengers seated at these exits will be responsible for opening the exit in the event of an emergency. Passengers should be briefed accordingly before departure to ensure that they are able-bodied (can open and operate the exit) and understand what they need to do, should an emergency evacuation be needed. This will involve the cabin crew explaining to the passengers before the flight departs, where they are sat – should they not already be aware that they are seated at an emergency exit – and how to operate the exit. The cabin crew should also ensure that any bags or items of clothing that could obstruct the exit are safely stowed away during taxi, take-off and landing.

The report was referred to the operator for comment, who confirmed that they would speak with the manager at the base in question to ensure that all crew were reminded of the overwing exit briefings and that they should always be conducted pre-departure.

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ROSTERING SOFTWARE FDP VIOLATION

Report Text: The Senior Cabin Crew Member was called off an Airport Duty to operate a series of flights. Her early start time meant her maximum FDP was much lower than the rest of the crew who reported later. After questioning the length of the duty the crewing officer told the SCCM that she was within hours to do the duty.

During sector 4, I calculated that the SCCM was exceeding her maximum FDP by nearly 1 hour and that she shouldn't have been rostered all 4 sectors. On return to base, the roster system should have presented me with a discretion report to sign which it did not, showing that the crewing officer's information, when quizzed earlier, was consistent. I queried this with the crewing supervisor and suggested that they manually check the times. They then discovered the violation and amended the roster system in such a way that the violation was recorded and I (reluctantly) completed the discretion form.

I am very concerned that this may have been happening on a regular basis and the rostering software not only fails to detect it but that it is allowed to happen in the first place. It appears that when a crew member is called from Airport Duty, the FDP start for the rest of the crew is used instead of that crew member having their own start time. This is the second time that I know of when the wrong maximum FDP has been used, but in the first issue there was no question of exceeding the maximum FDP so although reported to crewing, was not investigated further.

Lessons Learned - I have learnt not to trust the crewing computers to have the correct information about flight time limitations, and always do my own calculations.

CHIRP **Comment:** Computerised rostering systems are in widespread use and are essential for larger operators. However, any system requiring a manual input is vulnerable to human error. The operator has advised that when a crew member is allocated a flight from duty at the airport it is necessary for a crewing officer to make a manual input into the rostering system in order that it calculates the maximum allowable FDP; all the Operator's crewing officers have been reminded about this requirement.

Although it is the Commander's responsibility to ensure that crewmembers operate within the relevant FTL, Commanders may not be in possession of all the relevant information; they need to rely on crewing staff to ensure compliance with the regulations. Cabin crew should be proactive in assisting Commanders to meet their responsibilities when they know or suspect they have a different start time, or are in different state of acclimatisation, to other members of the crew – this is already an SOP for some operators.

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