

Continued FAA Vigilance

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The Federal Aviation Administration has taken the appropriate step to protect the safety of American air travelers by its latest disciplinary action against an airline. This time the carrier was the largest commuter airline in the United States, Provincetown-Boston Airlines Inc., which the FAA has grounded on several charges of violating safety regulations.

No one wishes 1,500 employees to be put out of work, even temporarily, nor to inconvenience daily several thousand air travelers in New England and the South, where this airline operated. But the public's safety must come first.

Generally, the safety record of U.S. airline flights is excellent; hundreds of thousands of Americans fly daily in full comfort and safety. Still, the FAA properly seeks to hold all airlines to the highest safety standards in every area, through what Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole calls a "white glove" inspection program.

Over the past year the FAA has conducted particularly rigorous checks of airline safety. It has moved to hire an additional 166 inspectors, to bring the FAA's inspection force back to the level that existed when the Reagan Administration took office.

In the initial findings of this tougher inspection program the FAA concluded that in 50 U.S. airlines safety-related problems required additional study, thus putting them on notice that some safety-related aspects of their operations would have to be improved.

And in a separate move to bolster air safety, after years of testing the FAA last month required that within three years flame-retardant seat-covers must be in place on all airline jets.

Now PBA has become the third commuter airline to be grounded within the past year on charges of safety violations. If it is permitted to fly again, the airline must revamp both its training of flight crews and its maintenance, and must satisfy the FAA that its current crews are well trained and are performing all safety-related tasks to the letter of the law.

American air passengers should be reassured to know that the FAA is holding airlines to stringent safety standards.

Village Advertiser Commentary:

While the pilot of an aircraft takes his own life in his hands whenever he flies, he holds between his palms the lives of the plane's passengers and crew, as well. One mistake, one safety standard violated or ignored, puts in jeopardy the lives of all on board. Even though PBA has enjoyed an enviable safety record, let's not push luck any further.