

ALPA WHITE PAPER



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AVIATION SAFETY ACTION PROGRAM REPORTING OF SECURITY INFORMATION

Introduction

Over the past few years, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has transformed its security policy and procedures from a one-size-fits-all approach to an intelligence-driven, risk-based security (RBS) strategy. ALPA was one of the earliest industry proponents of RBS and continues to advocate for this methodology, which leverages what is known about passengers, crews, and cargo to enable more effective and efficient security measures. The airline industry has long collected safety reports from frontline employees via the Aviation Safety Action Program (ASAP) to enhance aviation safety. Those reports, submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), occasionally contain details of security-related events that should be provided to TSA. ALPA believes that a specific “ASAP type” reporting system should be developed to provide security reports from frontline employees to the TSA to enhance the intelligence collection needs of RBS.

The Aviation Safety Action Program

The purpose of ASAP is to encourage and use voluntarily reported safety information provided by frontline industry personnel to identify safety risks. The FAA initiated several demonstration ASAP programs in the late 1990s that encouraged airline employees to participate by voluntarily disclosing information about safety-related events. ASAP, which relies on a memorandum of understanding between the FAA, the participating airline, and labor representatives, collects data in a standardized format that is reviewed by an Event Review Committee (ERC). Reports are accepted into the program for safety analysis, and confidentiality and disciplinary protections are provided unless the report meets specific exclusionary criteria, such as criminal activity or intentional disregard to safety by the individual reporting.

The FAA and industry safety professionals and groups have used ASAP and other sources of confidential safety information, along with

technological improvements, to reduce the fatality risk for commercial aviation in the United States by 83 percent from 1998 to 2008. FAA Advisory Circular (AC) 120-66B, “Aviation Safety Action Program,” provides further information about the program. A draft revision of this AC that incorporates, among other proposed changes, the FAA’s compliance philosophy is presently being reviewed by the industry.

ASAP reports accepted by the ERC are protected by congressional legislation from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). This is done to ensure the confidentiality of the report and reporter. An amendment to this legislation is needed to protect security information that is voluntarily submitted to the TSA from FOIA disclosure as well.

Aviation Security Information

Airline pilots and other frontline aviation employees are well suited to serve as the “eyes and ears” of the industry. They know their workplace very well, they recognize something out of place or suspicious because of their intimate knowledge of the aviation domain, and they want to help make aviation more secure. Present means for reporting security information largely consist of employees notifying law enforcement or their company of suspicious activity or security incidents in keeping with the Department of Homeland Security’s “see something, say something” campaign.

Security information presently collected by the FAA and industry from ASAP reports is not routed to the TSA in a consistent, effective manner. The TSA’s Airport Access Control Working Group, in its April 8, 2015, report to the acting administrator, identified the need for the use of expanded and more formalized collection and use of intelligence at the local level:

“TSA needs to expand traditional domestic intelligence analysis methods and better convey domestic threats by airport location. One emerging option is the Air Domain Intelligence Integration and Analysis Center (ADIAC). This paradigm-changing initiative

places industry subject matter experts alongside government analysts in a classified environment allowing for a joint review of current intelligence streams and analysis of the threat posed to airport and aircraft operators. Additionally, a more formal process exists at the unclassified level for airport and aircraft operator personnel that requires the sharing of information about terrorist threat streams at specific airports. For strictly communication purposes, TSA could consider expanding appropriate platforms to provide greater information sharing between public and private sectors, especially as it relates to domestic threats. These measures are needed to support a focused surge screening/inspection operation.”

Recommendations

ALPA recommends that the TSA, in collaboration with the FAA and industry partners, expand the use of the ASAP reporting process—inclusive of all protections—to specifically include security-related information from frontline employees. Current ASAP-formatted reporting forms can be modified to request security information. Additional fields or forms can be created as needed to accommodate the reporting of suspicious persons, security issues pertaining to crew hotels, ground transportation, the airport environment, and other areas of airline employee security in domestic and foreign locations.

As envisioned, once an ASAP report is submitted and designated as a security report, it would be identified as either a suspicious person’s report or physical security report. A suspicious person’s report would be forwarded immediately to U.S. government representatives, and physical security reports would be distributed to the government and appropriate stakeholder entities. Physical security items would further be delineated by type (e.g., aircraft, airport areas, hotel/layover location, etc.), thus making proper reports to company

and labor representatives. If designed as such, the reports could be identified and forwarded automatically to the appropriate parties for their respective use.

ALPA believes that a working group, comprised of the TSA, the FAA, and stakeholder representatives, including ALPA, should be convened to thoroughly discuss these recommendations and determine how to best adapt the ASAP process for reporting security information.

