



Federal Bureau of Investigation
Houston Division
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PRESS RELEASE

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HOUSTON SECOND IN NATION FOR LASER STRIKES AGAINST AIRCRAFT

Local, State and Federal Agencies Respond - Launch Campaign and Offer Up to \$10,000 Reward!

The FBI joined local, state, and federal partners today to announce a campaign and reward program to deter people from pointing lasers at aircraft. As it turns out, the Houston area ranks second in the nation in reported air strikes against aircraft. Aiming a laser pointer at an aircraft is a violation of state and federal law.

Reported incidents of the state and federal violation are on the rise. Since the FBI and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) began tracking laser strikes in 2005, statistics reflect a more than 1,100 percent increase in the deliberate targeting of aircraft by people with handheld lasers. In 2013, there were a total of 3,960 laser strikes reported – an average of almost 11 incidents per day. Texas recorded 418 of the nation’s laser strikes that year. Industry experts say laser attacks present potential dangers for pilots.

“Shining a laser into the cockpit of an aircraft can temporarily blind a pilot, jeopardizing the safety everyone on board,” said FAA Administrator Michael Huerta. “We applaud our colleagues at the Justice Department for aggressively prosecuting aircraft laser incidents and we will continue to use civil penalties to further deter this dangerous activity.”

In Houston, there were 126 laser strikes reported in 2013. Only Portland ranked higher with 139 strikes reported. FBI analysis shows laser strikes happen most frequently between midnight and 7a.m., with the greatest strikes occurring between 3a.m. and 4a.m. In many cases, laser strikes are being committed by teens and adults between the ages of 35-45. Most don’t comprehend the serious consequences of lasing, and in some cases, are unaware it is against the law.

“Aiming a laser pointer at an aircraft is a serious matter and a violation of federal law,” said Ron Hosko, Assistant Director of the FBI’s Criminal Investigative Division. “It is important that people understand that this is a criminal act with potentially deadly repercussions.”

In February 2012, President Barrack Obama signed the “FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012” and added a new provision that makes it a federal crime to aim a laser pointer at an aircraft. On the State level, violators may also be charged with Illuminating Aircraft with Laser Point.

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In an effort to raise public awareness about the issue, Houston area local, state and federal agencies are launching a targeted reward program. Together, with Crime Stoppers of Houston, the program will offer a reward of up to \$10,000 for information that leads to the arrest of any individual who aims a laser at an aircraft. A similar reward program will also be offered in 12 other cities across the country.

Beginning today, Clear Channel Outdoor will display messages on billboards across the Houston area to educate the public about the dangers and penalties associated with laser pointers aimed at aircraft. The company is donating space and time on their digital and traditional billboards throughout the area as a public service to the community. Public Service Announcements will also air on radio stations in Houston and in other cities across the country. In addition, the FBI and its initiative partners will be working to educate teens about the dangers associated with lasing.

Thousands of laser attacks go unreported every year. If you have information about a lasing incident, or see someone pointing a laser at an aircraft, call the Houston office of the FBI at 713-693-5000. Tips can also be submitted to Crime Stoppers of Houston by calling 713-222-TIPS (8477) or by texting TIP610 plus your tip to CRIMES (274637) or online at www.crime-stoppers.org. All tipsters will remain anonymous.

Under federal law, knowingly aiming a laser pointer at an aircraft is a felony offense, carrying a maximum sentence of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. Under Texas state law, illuminating aircraft with laser point is a Class A misdemeanor, carrying a maximum sentence of one year in jail and/or up to a four thousand dollar fine.

The FBI partnered with the Houston Airport System to launch today's event at the George Bush Intercontinental Airport along with representatives from the Federal Aviation Administration, United State's Attorney's Office – Southern District of Texas, Harris County District Attorney's Office, Houston Police Department, Harris County Sheriff's Office, Federal Air Marshal Service, Transportation Security Administration, Air Line Pilots Association, Crime Stoppers of Houston and Clear Channel Outdoor.

(FBI Field Offices participating in the regional reward program are: Albuquerque, Chicago, Cleveland, Houston, Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Sacramento, San Antonio, San Juan and the Washington Field Office.)



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