



'They have the potential for doing a lot of damage,' FAA administrator says.

Incidents of lasers vs. aircraft hit a record

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There have been more than 3,000 reported instances of lasers being pointed into aircraft so far this year — eclipsing the previous one-year record logged in 2010, according to federal aviation officials.

"We don't want anybody laboring under the assumption that these are toys," said Randy Babbitt, administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration. "They're not. They have the potential for doing a lot of damage."

Babbitt said in a Thursday telephone interview that as of Nov. 11, there have been 3,048 reported laser incidents across the country. The previous high was 2,836 incidents recorded last year.

FAA's formal reporting system began in 2005.

In St. Louis, there have been 20 laser incidents so far this year, FAA officials said Thursday. Last year, there were 17 recorded in the airspace near Lambert-St. Louis International Airport.

When a high-powered laser shines into the cockpit of an airplane or helicopter, it can temporarily blind a pilot and make it difficult to safely fly or land the aircraft, Babbitt said.

Federal authorities have pursued civil cases against people for violating FAA prohibitions against interfering with a flight crew. Violators could be subject to a civil fine of up to \$11,000.

Babbitt, a former commercial airline pilot, said the FAA and pilots groups support pending legislation that would make such misuse of lasers a stand-alone crime.

Earlier this year, an O'Fallon, Mo., man issued a public apology for shining a green laser into the cockpit of Metro Air Support helicopter. A week later, in an unrelated incident, another helicopter was hit with a green laser above the Webster Groves area.

Babbitt said the FAA recently launched a website to provide information on the danger of laser incidents and to make it easier for pilots and witnesses to report the incidents.