



*A bold voice for transportation workers*

## **LASERS: A RISING THREAT TO AVIATION SAFETY**

While laser illuminations of aircraft have been a concern for more than a decade, the startling increase in reported incidents in the last year represents an escalating threat to aviation safety and should raise concerns in all modes of transportation. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) earlier this year announced that nationwide reports of lasers pointed at aircraft nearly doubled from 1,527 incidents in 2009 to more than 2,800 last year. Aiming a laser at an aircraft creates a dangerous situation for pilots, especially when the aircraft is close to the ground during the most critical stages of flight: takeoff and landing. Laser illuminations of an aircraft flight deck can cause temporary blindness and incapacitation and even permanently damage a pilot's eyes. The risks associated with laser illuminations are simply unacceptable and efforts must be taken immediately to end the misuse of lasers in our nation's airspace.

Without a doubt, there are many legitimate outdoor uses of lasers; however, the reckless or malicious use of lasers to illuminate an aircraft is dangerous and must be stopped. To that end, TTD supports federal legislation to prosecute those who intentionally shine a laser at an aircraft.

TTD is pleased the U.S. House of Representatives took quick action by unanimously passing the Securing Aircraft Cockpits Against Lasers Act (H.R. 386), early in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress. The bill makes intentionally shining a laser at an aircraft, or its flight path, a federal offense. H.R. 386 was introduced by Rep. Dan Lungren (R-CA) who introduced similar legislation which passed in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress. The U.S. Senate recently adopted an identical amendment to the FAA reauthorization bill (S. 223) sponsored by Sens. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Barbara Boxer (D-CA).

Enactment of this legislation will ensure that malicious laser illumination of aircraft will be prosecuted as a specific federal offense and not solely as a violation of state laws or under a broader federal prohibition of interfering with an aircraft. This legislation will provide additional benefit by informing the public that shining laser lights into aircraft cockpits is a dangerous offense which will be met with serious consequences. We urge Congress to pass this much-needed legislation and send it to the President as soon as possible.

We also call on the FAA to develop additional safety enhancements to mitigate the risks associated with laser illuminations. For example, the size of laser-free zones around airports should be expanded to more accurately reflect the range of lasers available today. The outdoor use of all lasers should be expressly prohibited in these zones. The FAA should also develop and implement improved air traffic control and pilot operating procedures for responding to, notifying pilots about, and re-routing aircraft around threat areas when reports of illuminations are received. Specific procedures should also be established for notifying local and federal law enforcement when a laser illumination has been reported.

Finally, we would note that the threat to safety posed by the inappropriate use of lasers in the aviation arena can similarly threaten the safety of other modes of transportation. We call on the Administration to take steps to mitigate the threats of lasers on the transportation sector. Specifically, we urge the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) to add deliberate laser illuminations of all modes of transportation to its list of Most Wanted Safety Improvements. Further, we encourage the U.S. government to review the classification, the sale, and use of portable lasers that are strong enough to cause injury. The traveling public deserves no less.

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