

CALL FOR LASERS TO BE CLASSED AS OFFENSIVE WEAPONS AMID THOUSANDS OF INCIDENTS

News / Airlines



Police are being forced to respond to thousands of laser pen incidents resulting in calls for them to be classed as offensive weapons.

Since 2014 there have been almost 6,500 police reports involving laser pens, including shining them into aeroplane cockpits, at oncoming traffic and into people's front rooms.

This includes officers responding to more than 400 cases of aircraft being targeted as well as dozens of emergency service helicopters.

In response, a pilot's union has warned the consequences could soon be disastrous and called for a change in the legislation to class them as offensive weapons.

In February a Virgin Atlantic flight to New York JFK was forced to return to Heathrow as a "precautionary measure" after a laser was shone at the cockpit.

And just nine days later a British Airways service from Amsterdam was affected when a beam was aimed at the aircraft as it headed towards the west-London hub.

Freedom of information requests by the Press Association revealed Greater Manchester Police had dealt with 1,039 incidents since 2014, with 156 of them involving aircraft.

Northumbria Police recorded 566 incidents, Sussex 561, Kent 438, South Wales 388 and South Yorkshire 349.

British Transport Police, the police service for the train network, said they had dealt with 151 incidents.

And the overall figure is likely to be much higher as 16 police forces either refused to provide the information or did not respond.

Stephen Landells, flight safety expert at the British Airline Pilots Association (Balpa), warned of the possible consequences for single-pilot aircraft and helicopters as the power of lasers available to the public continues to increase.

"What we're seeing now is the increase in power of lasers and the build quality is getting better," he said.

"This means the divergence is getting better so you end up with a pinpoint light and can dazzle pilots from a greater distance and higher height.

"I went and bought a laser and worked out you could basically blind someone from nearly a kilometre away and there's absolutely no use for this except as a weapon.

"Any single-pilot operation, be it helicopter or light aircraft, if you take away the pilots vision at night the consequences could be disastrous.

"The other concern I have is if you have very powerful lasers with a wide beam you could conceivably have a wide enough beam to affect both pilots."

Mr Landells said the law needed to change so people had to have a good reason to be carrying a laser, which would allow the police to act when they had reasonable suspicion of misuse.

"If the police get a report that aircraft are being lasered going into Heathrow and they find someone standing there with a laser in their pocket, there is nothing they can do at the moment because lasers don't come under the offensive weapon legislation," he said.

"The law says you can't carry a knife without good reason - a carpet fitter going into a building in the afternoon has a reason to carry a knife. But someone walking down the street at 11pm outside a pub doesn't.

"And we want lasers to come under that same legislation so the police can say we have reasonable suspicion and they can be arrested."

The Civil Aviation Authority said they received 882 reported incidents of planes being targeted with lasers in the first three-quarters of 2015 and a total of 1,440 in 2014.

Top 10 total incidents:

Greater Manchester Police - 1039

Northumbria Police - 566

Sussex Police - 561

Kent Police - 438

South Wales Police - 388

South Yorkshire Police - 349

Derbyshire Police - 292

Cheshire Police - 284

Hertfordshire Constabulary - 265

Staffordshire Police - 213

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SOURCE: DAILY MAIL

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