PILOTS THREATEN TO STRIKE OVER FATIGUE CONCERNS

News / Airlines

Some airlines are fatiguing pilots by forcing them to work for 20 hours without an adequate break, sparking concerns about safety and raising the prospect of strike action towards the end of the summer holidays, the pilots' union has warned.

Brian Strutton, the new general secretary of the British Airline Pilots' Association (BAPLA), said that employees at one major, unidentified carrier are considering industrial action over the issue which, if approved, would take disrupt flights in September. He claimed new flight time rules introduced by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) in February had made it easier for airlines to force pilots to fly for longer and that "some real horror stories being reported to us".

Mr Strutton, who took over as head of the union earlier this month, said it had compiled "really worrying stats" that raised broader concerns about safety. Some pilots are working for 20 hours with no time for rest breaks between flight turnarounds, the BALPA head claimed.

"We've just done a survey and a touch under half of pilots have told us that they've been compromised by fatigue at least once a month this year," he said. "And by compromised, it's a polite way of saying dropping off or losing concentration at the controls."

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Following the new EASA rules, BALPA has been negotiating new roster arrangements.

Plane

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“In most airlines we’ve tried to keep a sensible balance in place still,” Mr Strutton said. “One of the major airlines we haven’t done that and we’ve fallen into dispute with that airline and our members in that airline have asked us to sanction a strike ballot in that company.”

It would be a blow to the aviation industry whichhas already been hit by a wave of strikes by air traffic controllers in Europe, causing thousands of flights to be cancelled this year.

Separately, Mr Strutton said that defence technology company Qinetiq was being lined up to research the impact of drone strikes on aircraft, something that is becoming a major concern in the aviation industry.

BALPA is organising the study with the Civil Aviation Authority and the Department for Transport, but it is being held by a disagreement of whether the findings should be freely available.

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