



UNITED IS ADDING A TRAINING SAFETY DAY FOR ALL 12,000 PILOTS

News / Airlines



United Continental Holdings Inc. is adding special training for all 12,000 pilots to boost safety and improve communication as the industry braces for a generational turnover among cockpit-crew members.

The day-long sessions follow a strong letter United sent to pilots a year ago, warning of “major safety events and near misses” that included the use of an aircraft’s ground proximity warning system and required the pilot to pull up quickly. United’s new program isn’t a direct response to those incidents, spokesman Charlie Hobart said.

“This is a program that is forward-looking,” Hobart said. “It was designed to address changes in the industry that will affect every carrier.”

United’s effort extends a transition under way since Oscar Munoz replaced Jeff Smisek as chief executive officer in September. Management and pilots have clashed before over safety, and in 2015 the airline admonished some crew members for lapses. Before taking a medical leave for a heart attack and subsequent transplant, Munoz moved to ease years of labor discord and helped set the stage for a pilot contract extension.

The new program was developed in conjunction with the Air Line Pilots Association and individual aviators, Hobart said. Messages left Saturday with ALPA for a comment about the training weren’t

immediately returned.

As younger pilots join United and some move into captain's roles, the airline is trying to improve inter-generational communications, Hobart said. Encouraging mentoring among pilots is a goal, he said. United hired 800 new pilots in 2015 as the airline prepares to receive 200 new jets in coming years and confronts a wave of industrywide retirements.

Without elaborating on the coming cultural challenges, Hobart said a pilot in his or her 20s may rely more heavily on mobile devices than a veteran aviator. He didn't give any specific communications issues within United's cockpits.

United pilots will go through five modules during the day-long training — two dealing with operational issues including following standard operating procedures, and three dealing with cultural and generational issues, Hobart said.

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