WESTJET PILOT SEEKS MEDICAL ATTENTION AFTER LASER STRIKE DURING FLIGHT TO FORT MCMURRAY

News / Airlines

A WestJet pilot sought medical attention after a laser strike during a flight to Fort McMurray last month, airline officials say.

The laser was shone into the cockpit of a WestJet aircraft on Aug. 22, WestJet spokeswoman Lauren Stewart said in an email. The flight landed safely in Fort McMurray, but the next flight was cancelled until a replacement co-pilot could be brought in.

Pilots are trained to look away to protect their eyes in the event of a laser strike, but the pilot was advised to seek medical attention as a precaution.

"A laser has the potential to cause harm to their eyes," Stewart said. "Sadly, laser strikes are not uncommon and come with real repercussions for our crew. Shining a laser in a manner that could result in injury or serious damage is an incredibly thoughtless thing to do."

Stewart could not comment on the pilot's condition, citing privacy concerns.

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Laser strikes happen often in the aviation industry. Forty laser incidents were reported in Alberta in May, and there were 500 laser incidents in Canada in 2015. In May, the federal government launched a social media campaign centred around the issue of people pointing lasers at planes.

The punishment for anyone caught shining a laser at an aircraft is a fine of up to $100,000, five years in prison, or both.

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