



AVIATION SAFETY

Better Guidance and Training Needed on Providing Files on Pilots' Background Information

Highlights of [GAO-02-722](#), a report to the Chairman and Ranking Democratic Member, Subcommittee on Aviation, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure.

Why GAO Did This Study

In 1996, Congress enacted the Pilot Records Improvement Act to keep unsafe pilots out of the cockpits of commercial aircraft. GAO did this study to determine (1) whether air carriers have complied with the act by requesting and receiving key documents about pilots' qualifications, performance, and training from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the National Driver Register (NDR), and other carriers and whether these documents have been provided on time; (2) whether carriers are aware of requirements for protecting pilots' rights; (3) what FAA has done to oversee compliance with the act; and (4) whether carriers believe the act has helped them make pilot-hiring decisions.

What GAO Recommends

To promote greater awareness of and compliance with the act, GAO recommends that the Secretary of Transportation direct the FAA Administrator to develop clarifying guidance for carriers on the contents of pilot records and on retaining the files of pilots hired, post information on pilots' rights on FAA's Web site, and incorporate the act's requirements into FAA inspectors' training and handbooks.

FAA agreed with GAO's recommendations.

What GAO Found

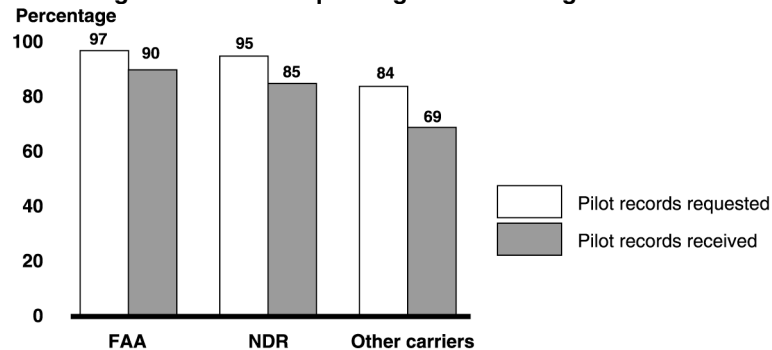
GAO found, from analyzing FAA and NDR databases and from surveying air carriers that had made at least one request to FAA for pilot records, that compliance has increased since the act took effect in 1997, but noncompliance is also occurring. For example, hiring carriers requested and received records less often from other carriers than from FAA and NDR, and other carriers provided records with more delays than the agencies. (See figure below.) Until they receive the required records, hiring carriers are not allowed to use pilots to fly passengers or cargo.

Carriers are not always aware of the act's requirements for protecting pilots' rights, especially of those for notifying pilots of requests for their records and for allowing them to review and submit written corrections before final hiring decisions are made. Pilots also lacked awareness that they could request copies of their records from current as well as former employers. However, if the records are inaccurate, the opportunity for pilots to submit corrections does not come until after hiring carriers have already received the records.

To oversee compliance with the act, FAA developed guidance but was slow to update it after the act was amended and has not included information on the act in the agency's training or handbooks for inspectors. As a result, carriers and pilots lack awareness of some provisions, and FAA inspectors are not prepared or prompted to review compliance. FAA's ability to enforce compliance is limited because carriers are not required to retain the files on pilots hired that FAA needs to monitor and enforce compliance.

While finding pilot records helpful, carriers found them less helpful than information from other sources, such as job interviews, flight evaluations, and training programs. The carriers were divided in their opinions on whether the records were worth the cost.

Percentage of Carriers Requesting and Receiving Pilot Records in 2000



Source: GAO analysis of survey responses from larger (Part 121) carriers.