

The National Association of Government Employees has made numerous, close studies of conditions within the Federal Aviation Agency and finds a clear need for an immediate full-scale Congressional inquiry. Such a study should make determinations as to the safety "quotient" for the public under current FAA operational procedures and policies. The FAA, we believe, needs the same kind of Congressional investigative focus that was recently given the automotive industry safety standards. There are far too few controllers on duty at traffic control centers; we need many more controllers and other personnel; many FAA facilities are seriously undermanned. This is FALSE ECONOMY, which turns our airways into casings that gamble with human lives, and which can only have the effect of constricting the growth of the aviation industry.

When anything goes wrong in the crowded skies around airports, the FAA is quick to try and make the controllers the scapegoat. But the real trouble is that too few people have to handle too many aircraft. There is never any crowd in a control room.

In the conviction that there is direct relationship between "system errors" and facility staffing inadequacies, and that all "conflictions" are not reported in an attempt by the FAA to cover up the seriousness of conditions, a large NAGE Local at a major airport recently submitted a series of questions to the membership—and asked for frank answers.

Overwhelmingly, these experienced staffers (ARTCC) estimated that there was at least one "confliction," sometimes as many as five, on an average day at the facility. They testified to having personally seen an average of two or three "legal conflictions" in the previous two months. Opinions as to the need for "last minute" action to avoid conflict between aircraft—considered in a Radar environment—ranged from five up to 25 per day.

Almost all expressed belief that fewer "conflictions," whether discovered or not, would be possible if staffing were increased to distribute the workload. A preponderance reported there was less than full staffing in their particular sector every day they worked!

Assistance of a handoff man was listed as a relative rarity.

Asked, "Have you ever been forced into a position where you no longer have time to pre-plan or thoroughly scan the control board in order to make the right decision?" a majority replied in the affirmative, and agreed that such situations were dangerous. Presence of handoff controller at all times would permit more time properly to scan the scope and control board, it was also agreed.

The controllers and other personnel almost unanimously believed that the Facility administrative staff was aware of the need for more personnel, and that safety was being compromised by a policy there of staffing for an 80% traffic level.

Too much traffic was almost unanimously blamed for the majority of incidents, as opposed to strip marking, lack of knowledge or phraseology.

As to whether they thought it was safer to fly through the area today than it was three years ago, a substantial majority replied: "No."

Not long ago, personnel officers in the New York area of the New York FAA Traffic Control Facility submitted confidential questionnaires to personnel in an "evaluation program." And the reaction was not flattering to the FAA.

The employee generally gave ratings of no better than "poor" or "fair" to such categories as the handling of work schedules and annual leave; policy with respect to overtime work; "spirit of cooperation" among employees; reputation of the Agency in the community; and personal evaluation of job.

This study, and other evidence, points to a serious morale problem among our over-worked controllers and other FAA personnel.

The situation, we contend, has attained crisis proportions. And what it boils down to is that there are not enough air traffic controllers to handle the growing number of flights, and, on top of this, the controllers do not have adequate modern equipment to do their jobs.

The FAA must awaken to the controllers' plight. It must acknowledge that all is not as it should be, and that if action does not come, and come soon, we have all the ingredients for further tragedies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of all of the facts, the National Association of Government Employees earnestly urges the Congress to consider the following:

1. The immediate enactment of legislation authorizing a 20% increase of Controller staffing at all Air Traffic Control Centers, Air Traffic Control Towers,