

# All Stressed Out...Who're You Going To Call?

By FO David Fredrickson - Aeromedical Committee - EAP/HIMS and Linda Jacobson - APA STSA Technical Writer

Since 9/11, the aviation industry has undergone radical changes, ones not likely to be reversed. In the aftermath of this tragedy, pilots have been left to deal with an abnormal amount of job stress.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) defines particular conditions that lead to job stress. Functions at work that can lead to job stress include:

1. Design of Task
2. Management Style
3. Career Concerns
4. Environmental Conditions
5. Work Roles

The table below includes specific examples of these functions as they relate to a pilot's post-9/11 work environment.

Function	Pilot Work Environment
Design of Task	Longer working hours to produce more productivity
Management Style	Decisions made at the corporate level in which the pilot is not a participant
Career Concerns	Downsizing that results in job loss or job regression. Additional concerns over corporate insolvencies and mergers; anxiety over possible job furlough or guilt for co-worker's unemployment
Environmental Conditions	Concern for dangerous conditions; increased responsibility for aircraft security
Work Roles	Conflicting concern that security procedures are followed while still ensuring on-time flight performance

Assimilating these job-related changes has produced an upward trend in stress levels for our pilot members. Now more than ever before, our Aeromedical, Checkmate and Human Intervention & Motivation Study (HIMS) programs are noticing a definite surge in stress-related occurrences. Job stress can spill over into other areas that can create life stressors for a pilot:

- **Family changes:** Divorce or separation, death or birth of a family member, spouse starting a job, family member illnesses, moving
- **Work changes:** Seniority slide, displacements, furloughs, school house factors (i.e., late night sims, cheap hotel, check ride busts)
- **Personal changes:** Pilot illness (i.e., depression, anxiety, fatigue, sleeplessness),

relationship strife (i.e., arguments, fights or disagreements, family violence)

- **Financial changes:** Pay cuts, down-sizing or forced liquidation, inability to meet expenses and/or declaring personal bankruptcy.

NIOSH studies have shown that short-lived or infrequent episodes of stress pose little risk, but when stressful situations are left

unresolved — or become the norm — the body is kept in a constant state of activation which increases the rate of “wear and tear” on biological systems. The nervous system is aroused, and hormones are released to sharpen the senses, quicken the pulse, deepen respiration, and tense the muscles. This response is commonly referred to as “fight or flight.”

Evidence is rapidly accumulating that suggests that stress, whether job or home-related, is linked to several types of chronic health problems: cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, and psychological disorders. At the least, long-term stress can result in fatigue, risk of injury, substance or alcohol abuse, or other disease.

Studies show that aviators in particular deal with stress differently than other occupational groups. Not surprisingly, a University of Texas study showed that a majority of pilots surveyed believed that they could leave personal problems

behind when working and that their decision-making ability is as effective in emergency situations as in normal situations.

Not so fast, says Dr. Tracy Dillinger, Chief of the U.S. Air Force Aviation Psychology Safety Center. A pilot's tendency to compartmentalize has its limitations and may pose a safety hazard to flight if the aviator is “distressed.” A “distressed” pilot is one who is likely to have compromised emotional well-being, such as a pilot who is experiencing marital problems. “Marital distress is a particularly significant source of stress for aviators,” according to Dr. Dillinger, “as it adversely affects a pilot's attention and flying performance.”

**Relationship problems filter into the cockpit — no matter how expert a pilot believes he is at compartmentalizing.** Human factors in aviation become particularly important when you consider that 75% of all aviation mishaps are caused by pilot error, according to the Naval Operational Medicine Institute (NOMI).

According to Captain Barrie Highby, a U.S. Air Force psychologist, pilots with personal problems may show adaptive coping behavior, but, in reality, they could be introducing increased safety risks because of denial:

1. A pilot tends to be unaware when he is in trouble because of the ability to compartmentalize and to handle stress effectively; pilots can exhibit diminished performance even when not consciously thinking about their life stressors.
2. Pilots experiencing significant stress tend to be overconfident in their flying capabilities and may even feel personally invulnerable to deficits in performance. This thinking is in direct opposition to studies that link pilots dealing with stressful life events to flight performance problems.
3. A pilot is unlikely to self-identify as being unfit for duty due to the enjoyment of flying. Flying is viewed as a pleasurable activity rather than as “work.” A pilot may also ignore grounding himself due to career concerns or the stigma associated with not flying due to personal or psychological conditions.
4. Overstressed female aviators will “hide” emotional distress which produces more depression and feelings of guilt and hopelessness, according to Commander Mark Mittauer, of the NOMI Psychiatry unit.

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**SUBMIT ARTICLES TO:**

Lynne Bowers-Clark,  
Editorial Services Manager  
Allied Pilots Association  
O'Connell Building  
14600 Trinity Blvd., Suite 500  
Fort Worth, TX 76155-2512  
800.323.1470, ext. 2251  
(DFW area: 817.302.2251)  
E-mail: [lclark@hq.alliedpilots.org](mailto:lclark@hq.alliedpilots.org)

**DESIGN AND LAYOUT:**

Stacey Hull, Graphic Designer

# EU-US Open Skies Meeting

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have had with Jeffrey Shane (Under Secretary of Transportation for Policy) and John Byerly (Deputy Assistant Secretary for Transportation Affairs at the U.S. State Dept.), they have both assured us that cabotage will not be part of any agreement. That being said, the EU has asked for "Rights of Establishment" such that a foreign entity could start up an airline through the DOT, FAA and TSA using U.S. employees and following U.S. Tax code. During our conversations with the DOT and DOS both showed some interest in this idea, but said it wouldn't happen during this phase of talks. Last week the idea of the leasing of aircraft and crews came up. We're not sure of the context in which it was used, and we've got calls/e-mails into DOS and DOT looking for explanations. Remember changes in both cabotage and leasing policies require legislative action.

An increase in foreign ownership of U.S. airlines is part of the agreement on the table. Current U.S. law limits foreign ownership to 25% of the voting shares of a U.S. airline and prohibits any control over that airline. The Departments of Transportation and State support the increase to 49% of voting stock, but will still prohibit the foreign control of the day-to-day operations of the airlines. The increase in foreign ownership will also require legislative action. The *Financial Times* reports that Mr. Mica, Chairman of the House Aviation Subcommittee, has said there is "zero" chance that Congress would approve raising the foreign ownership limit on airlines to 49% this year.

We'll update you on the talks as information becomes available.



Allied Pilots Association  
O'Connell Building  
14600 Trinity Blvd., Suite 500  
Fort Worth, TX 76155-2512

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# Who're You Going To Call?

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In short: **Pilots remain one of the most difficult occupational groups to persuade to seek mental health assistance — even when they can barely function.**

How then do you identify if you are at risk? A first big step is to inventory your life situation. Consider whether you are experiencing a job stress, a life event stress, or several smaller stressors in your life. Taken alone, any one of your stresses may be easily handled but you need to look for a cumulative effect from stresses presently in your life. Then, look for warning signs from the checklist below.

If you answered "yes" to a majority of these questions, the APA Aeromedical Committee can direct you to several resources that can help. Depending

## PILOT STRESS CHECKLIST

- ✓ Have you been told you are hard to be around lately?
- ✓ Are you irritable most of the time?
- ✓ Are you fatigued or having trouble sleeping more often than not?
- ✓ Have you been told that you look stressed?
- ✓ Have you just recently experienced trouble in your personal relationships?
- ✓ Is everybody getting on your nerves?
- ✓ Has your alcohol consumption increased? If so, do you feel that you have to have a cocktail every night to take the edge off?
- ✓ Do you feel like you need to get away from it all?
- ✓ Are major life changes (i.e., divorce, bankruptcy, asset sales, moving) being forced upon you?
- ✓ Do you feel powerless and that you are being taken advantage of?
- ✓ Do you feel afraid of the future or like you are waiting for the other "shoe" to drop?
- ✓ Are you afraid of the school house or that you cannot make it through your next check ride?

on your particular stress events, the APA offers different programs to assist you.

Just log onto the APA Web Site and navigate to the Aeromedical Committee Web page. You'll find links to all of the Aeromedical programs along with contact numbers and e-mails. We have created a special notice section that allows you to contact fellow pilots who have already been through what you are going through. You may also speak to an Aeromedical Committee member by calling 800.323.1470, ext. 3043.

As pilots, we need to remember that our safety and well-being must be the number one item on our personal checklist. Others are depending on it.