

DGCA proposes to limit pilot work hours

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 04 November, 2023



New Delhi: Civil Aviation regulator DGCA has proposed to make significant changes to its rules which will ensure pilots get more rest and restrict the hours they work at night in the cockpit. It has made it mandatory for airlines to submit a quarterly report on fatigue report filed by pilots

The regulator's action comes after complaints from a large number of pilots that they are being stretched by the airlines using the regulator's soft rules which ensures they are not violating the norms. In August, an IndiGo pilot died due to a sudden cardiac arrest at the Nagpur airport minutes before operating the flight.

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According to the proposed rules which have been opened for public consultation, the regulator has cut down the maximum flight duty period from 13 to 10 hours for a pilot operating at night that is between 12 AM and 6 AM. DGCA has also said that a pilot can do a maximum of two landings during that period.

“Pilots operating that period remain the most vulnerable to fatigue because it falls within the window of circadian low (WOCL) meaning the body experiences the highest level of sleepiness and performance capability is at lowest. We want to limit

the number of flights a pilot does during that period,” a senior DGCA official said.

There has been an exponential increase in the number of red eye flights which depart at night and arrive the next morning over the last few years due to slot constraint at metro airports.

For flights which are above 14 hours, DGCA has restricted the maximum flight time to 17 hours and asked airlines to provide a rest of at least 120 hours after each flight. The rest period shall increase by 24 hours after two consecutive ULR or ultra long haul flights.

Senior DGCA officials have done extensive consultation with pilots and airlines so that the rules are practical to new situations emerging in modern aviation. Over the last four months, DGCA had collected pilot fatigue data during spot checks and surveillance of airlines to see if regulations related to flight duty times or fatigue need to be changed, the official said.

For instance, the regulator has the flight duty period of a pilot should also include the time taken for swapping of aircraft while going through formalities like customs, immigration and security.

“Multiple pilots had submitted the feedback that most airports have multi-terminal operations now due to which the pilot, after a flight has to come out of the terminal, commute to the new one and go through all the procedures again. They said that the existing rules don’t consider the time taken for this. So, this change has been made,” the official said.

Senior pilots said that the regulator's new guidelines are more mature than the existing one. “The previous one was more of a copy paste from American and European regulators. This one considers that India has a different geography and duration of flights,” a senior pilot of Air India said.

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