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Charter and Fractional Safety:

ACSF Supports Single Charter Standard

The Air Charter Safety Foundation (ACSF) is trying to encourage charter and fractional operators to support the move to a single safety audit standard—its own—to end confusion about the multiple standards currently being used and eliminate the expense of auditing to the various standards.

Some operators face up to half a dozen audits per year at a cost of \$10,000 to \$15,000 each, according to ACSF president Bryan Burns, and it would be far simpler if they had to meet just one standard of compliance. Burns added that standards created by private companies are undisclosed, unlike those of the ACSF Industry Audit Standard, which are published on the ACSF website.

Burns emphasized that ACSF is not trying to compete with other standards-setting companies such as Argus International, Wyvern and SH&E, but wants to create “the highest standard possible that’s reasonable to achieve.” These companies offer their own standards and provide auditing services. ACSF doesn’t do the audits but trains auditors, maintains the audit standard and reviews audits. ACSF charges an administration fee for its services, but it is up to the operator to pay for the audit itself. Companies such as Argus and Wyvern earn money by conducting the audits, he explained. “That’s where their benefit is financially.” So far 57 operators have been audited under the ACSF system.

Executive Jet Management (EJM), the charter/management arm of fractional operator NetJets, recently devised its own audit standard that supplemental lift providers have to undergo, necessitating that operators undergo multiple audits. EJM helped launch the ACSF standard, Burns said. “When we went to market, EJM embraced it and up till the first of this year endorsed it and used it. The ACSF standard was what operators had to comply with to supply supplemental lift to EJM. When EJM decided to go internally with its own standard, it left us a little bit confused. We’re trying to clarify the confusion.” He added, “We still have a good working relationship with them.”

In a statement provided to AIN, NetJets said, “In the past, NetJets has used third-party auditing companies to facilitate audits of its on-demand charter vendors. All NetJets on-demand charter



vendors receive an in-depth, on-site audit to ensure compliance with applicable regulatory requirements and utilization of industry-accepted and best safety and business practices. In addition to the in-depth audits facilitated by a third-party vendor, each NetJets vendor would undergo regular, on-site evaluations conducted by a NetJets Standards Department representative to ensure continued safety and compliance to NetJets standards. As a result of these regular evaluations performed by NetJets, the company has gained valuable insight to the overall safety and security of NetJets’ vendors. Based on this insight, NetJets has decided to perform the vendor auditing process internally.”

Advantage of Multiple Audits

Argus president Joe Moeggenberg believes that the ACSF Industry Audit Standard is hewing too closely to the airlines’ International Air Transport Association (IATA) standard. “The big problem is it’s not scalable,” he said. “It’s good only for really big operators that have the infrastructure to meet the audit standards. For an operator with two or three airplanes, it would be extremely

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expensive to comply with the ACSF standards. It really has a big impact on small operators.” Commenting on EJM’s move to using its own standard, he added, “I think they realized they can do it themselves for less and control the quality of the audit.”



David Rimmer

David Rimmer, executive vice president of charter operator ExcelAire, said, “I feel we benefit from multiple audits...from the different perspectives of different auditors. They make us better at what we do.”

ExcelAire is a vendor for EJM/NetJets and has been audited under many standards. Rimmer is also on the ACSF board of governors. “I like the idea of raising the bar, which is what ACSF is talking about,” he explained. “No one audit company has a monopoly on safety practices,” he said. “Audits are a benefit to us.”

Rimmer agrees that audits create a burden on smaller charter operators with little infrastructure and that audits don’t guarantee safety. But, he added, “It’s that extra bit of oversight. Otherwise the [minimum] standard is Part 135 [regulations]. Most operators aspire to exceed them.”

The ACSF standard does require that an operator have a safety management system in place, and that is an expense that concerns operators. Being audited to the ACSF standard also meets IS-

BAO Stage I requirements, and Burns plans to add more IS-BAO stages to the standard.

Burns doesn’t believe that the ACSF is trying to replicate the airlines’ IATA standard but that ACSF is emulating the concept of a single standard, which is what the airlines have achieved with IATA. “IATA has recognized one universal standard,” he said. “They finally joined forces and agreed.”

He is aware of the issue of whether the ACSF standard is a good fit for small operators. “There are discussions about whether the standard is too high. We’re talking about an operation that might have six or eight employees. Do they have the skills, the financial wherewithal to get to that point and the time to meet that standard? We might need to take a fresh look at operators that may not recognize the ACSF and find out why. It doesn’t necessarily make those small operators less safe. It’s a matter of the resources and the ability to meet the standard.”

Burns planned to hold a meeting of charter operators on May 4 to discuss the ACSF Industry Audit Standard and how it can help operators and why they should support ACSF’s efforts. ACSF is also working with the FAA on an effort to create an aviation safety action program (Asap) for Part 135 and 91(k) fractional share operators. The purpose of an Asap is to create a system that encourages employees to report any safety issues voluntarily, even if rules violations are involved, without fear of company or FAA retribution. Burns hopes to launch the Part 135/91(k) Asap, first with operators on the East Coast then nationwide. **AIN**



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