

# CALLBACK

From NASA's Aviation Safety Reporting System



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## An Old Threat From a New Enemy



COVID-19 continues to impact the aviation world with a multitude of threats and challenges. Many have not been previously observed in aviation. While maintaining proficiency is a constant challenge, the lack thereof is a foe that aircrews have battled since the birth of the airplane and is currently revealing itself as a novel concern. In the COVID-19 reports that ASRS is currently receiving, the subtle erosion of cognizance and execution that comes with reduced flight time is characterized as a far-reaching domino effect of the disease.

The effects are predictable, beginning with the lack of recent flying experience and newly instituted procedures and flows dictated by the virus. Similar effects from different stimuli have been observed on a much smaller scale. Extended vacations, medical issues, layoffs, or other issues that severely reduce the frequency and regular activities of flying have, in the past, resulted in a temporary decrease in proficiency. Likewise, a new piece of equipment or change in operations usually results in new procedures and changes to cockpit flows.

The extreme cutback in flying time caused by COVID-19 has prompted crewmembers, companies, and the FAA to address the corresponding decrease in proficiency with all its ramifications as well as the complex relationship between pilot proficiency and legal currency. This month, *CALLBACK* focuses on reports that highlight these concerns, which largely have been brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. The length of time that we will suffer reduced flying is unclear. What is clear is that in the COVID-19 era, an increased awareness and a heightened commitment to aviation discipline are indispensable to the continued safety of flight.

### One Small Step

This Flight Attendant was diligent and attempted to be meticulous in performing required duties, but a lack of recent experience resulted in missing one small, but important step.

■ Upon arrival, as the A Flight Attendant (FA), I made the disarming announcement, disarmed the door, and crosschecked my door (L1) and the R1 door. I then waited for the jetbridge and the Customer Service Agent (CSA), gave thumbs up, waited for the knock, then opened the

door. As I was opening, I heard the interphone ring. The D FA answered it. After I stepped away from the door to let guests off, I asked the D FA what the back FAs needed. The D FA stated that they were relaying that the aft doors were disarmed. I had forgotten to call them.

I take full responsibility. I rarely fly A, and due to COVID, I haven't been on an airplane in almost two months. I was trying to go slow and be cautious but missed that important step.

### Non-Normals for New-Hires

A new-hire First Officer laments the difficulties that COVID-19 has levied upon the initial training process. Scheduling training events, diminished proficiency, and the retention of skills and knowledge are discussed.

■ It has been nearly a month without any Initial Operating Experience (IOE) flights. I understand there is no requirement which defines the amount of time between completion of simulator training/operating experience, check-ride, and starting or completing IOE. However, I am very concerned about my diminishing level of proficiency starting IOE.

Over the course of the last month (due to the COVID-19 crisis), the flight schedule has become so restrictive that the...schedulers have been unable to execute many plans they have constructed for my flights and those of my classmates. I suspect the significant delays also extend to other classes waiting to complete IOE, as well as transitioning pilots needing to complete their Operational Experience (OE). Line Check Airman (LCA) availability has likely been further affected by other factors.

Beyond completion of IOE, I expect that the schedule restrictions will delay consolidation as well. Although an FAA extension to the consolidation timeline will put an administrative fix on that particular issue, it does nothing to assist with the retention of skills and knowledge.

### Back to Basics

This air carrier Captain was lulled by the COVID-19 environment, and a poorly planned, unstable approach was flown. Fortunately, the flight terminated safely, but some sound wisdom and stark lessons were revisited.

■ *With VFR conditions, ATC was vectoring us for the approach.... We were the only airplane in the sector due to the COVID flight reductions. We were on a downwind when we were asked if we had the airport in sight for a visual approach. I said that I did, and the FO was comfortable with my decision. This is where all the mistakes started.*

*I failed to communicate my plan on how to fly this approach. I disconnected the autopilot. I proceeded to the Final Approach Fix (FAF), told the FO to select 1,500 feet (the altitude for the FAF), and started to descend in Flight Level Change (FLCH). Since I haven't flown much since the flight reductions, I'm embarrassed to admit my flying skills were very poor. I descended to 1,300 feet at the FAF as I made the sharp turn to intercept. The FO was giving me good guidance, but the long day, lack of currency, and tunnel vision for the runway made me just not hear his excellent CRM prompting.... From the FAF to below 1,000 feet, I got below the glideslope twice. At 500 feet, we were stable and landed.*

*I should have gone around, but like the many pilots before me that have written scenarios of unstable approaches, I didn't. Why not? Because it was VFR, because it was an easy approach, because I could do this. All the reasons that lead to unstable approaches....*

*So many lessons learned from this one. Visual approaches are one of the most difficult to perform. We don't do them on a regular basis. Fly it as a full ILS. Give yourself enough room outside the FAF to get set up. Don't rush it. Use the autopilot to get set up. Don't hand fly, especially when it is late and you may be tired. Communicate all your intentions clearly to your flying partner. Verbalize, Verify, and Monitor (VVM). Hear and listen to your partner. They are two different things. Don't have a big ego.... Go around. It's not a failure. I know all of these lessons but failed to execute them. I'm sure the stress of current world events,... the lack of flying, and a lot of other outside influences are contributing factors to this [event] but are certainly no excuse.*

## Old Problems and New Normals

This air carrier Captain experienced a common problem, albeit this time in the COVID-19 climate. The shared insight, advice, and motivation are appropriate for any environment.

■ *I... was given instructions to cross ZZZZZ at FL290. I set a 500 foot per minute descent in the FMS, with intentions of verifying and adjusting once stabilized in the descent. Person A came from the cabin and began a conversation [in the] cockpit, distracting me from my intended task, and I did not see that we were not going to make 29,000 feet at ZZZZZ until just before crossing [the intersection]. I increased the rate of*

*descent in an attempt to make the restriction. I estimate missing crossing [the intersection] by 500 feet or possibly more, and at approximately the same time, Center called and gave us a descent to FL240, so we continued our descent. No mention was made by ATC of any conflict, nor were any questions asked regarding our status...for making the restriction.*

*This was our first trip in the aircraft in almost three months, due to COVID-19 pandemic issues, and also the first time we had worked as a crew in almost three months. Recent experience was certainly a factor, but not an excuse. I am extremely disappointed with myself for not staying better focused on my immediate task, and I counseled the FO on the duty to monitor when [performing] Pilot Not Flying [duties].*

*I suggest that all crews redouble efforts and vigilance in these trying times, as we are all working in unfamiliar situations now with the pressures put on us by the pandemic. Fortunately, at this early stage of things, moving back toward some semblance of normal, there was probably not...great possibility of a traffic conflict. That will change in the coming days, and even though we might not personally make any more mistakes as these, there will be other crews coming back to flying from furloughs, etc. that still need to get their game back. Looking out for ourselves and the other [crews] even more than we did before will be the new normal for some time.*

## Proficiency Problems and Currency Concerns

This air carrier First Officer identified two important issues during COVID-19 operations while implying that clear guidance is needed to ensure one and comply with the other.

■ *Due to the unprecedented events of COVID-19, the FAA has made special exemptions to requirements of meeting 90-day currency for takeoffs and landings for airmen [as well as] other rules in relation to currency of flight operations.... The exemption in question is the exemption for air carrier pilots that allows...additional calendar months before de-qualification.*

*As a member of a flight crew for a [Part] 121 operator, it has come to my attention that there has not been any guidance as to the scenario of two air carrier pilots, who have not flown within 90 days or greater, to fly together. One concern of mine is a flight crew operating where a Captain was on voluntary/non-voluntary time off for 90 days or greater, and a First Officer was also on voluntary/non-voluntary time off or not flying as a result of COVID affecting regular flights.*

*Keeping...the rule, 'No Green on Green' always in mind, I believe that the issue of pilot proficiency versus currency should be addressed.*

ASRS Alerts Issued in May 2020	
Subject of Alert	No. of Alerts
Aircraft or Aircraft Equipment	2
Airport Facility or Procedure	11
ATC Equipment or Procedure	6
Other	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20</b>

486  
 A Monthly Safety  
 Newsletter from  
**The NASA**  
 Aviation Safety  
 Reporting System  
 P.O. Box 189  
 Moffett Field, CA  
 94035-0189  
<https://asrs.arc.nasa.gov>

May 2020 Report Intake	
Air Carrier/Air Taxi Pilots	1,352
General Aviation Pilots	855
Flight Attendants	177
Mechanics	141
Controllers	96
Military/Other	73
Dispatchers	56
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,750</b>