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LASER ATTACKS ON AIRCRAFT SHOW INTELLIGENCE GAP

WASHINGTON – Capt. Jon Safley, president of the Coalition of Airline Pilots Associations, issued the following statement about the recent spate of laser incidents involving commercial aircraft in the United States:

“Pilots are very concerned about the apparent laser attacks on passenger airlines during the past several weeks, and even more concerned that they have not been given adequate warning about these incidents. We call on the Transportation Security Administration and the Federal Aviation Administration to conduct an immediate review and to provide flight crews with advice on how to deal with this dangerous situation.

“Following as many as a dozen recent laser incidents reported by pilots, key governmental agencies (Department of Homeland Security, TSA, FAA) maintain these incidents are not correlated with terrorism threats. Yet, the possibility of terrorism cannot be totally dismissed. Regardless of the motivation, these attacks have the dangerous potential to interfere with commercial flights and possibly put passengers and flight crews in danger. One pilot already incurred serious eye damage as a result of one of these powerful ground-to-air lasers.

“Governmental agencies charged with ensuring aviation safety and security remain strangely silent on the issue. What other damage could these lasers cause? Are there currently available early warning devices that should be installed on commercial aircraft?

“Pilots are deeply troubled that the lessons of 9/11 continue to go unheeded. An FBI and DHS bulletin on the laser danger, issued on Nov. 22, was not made available to pilots until Dec. 27. This is symptomatic of a continuing failure of the DHS, TSA and FBI to provide pilots with important intelligence they need to ensure the safety of the aircraft and their passengers. We urge the TSA to help close this loop, to tighten the security of commercial flights. Pilots certainly have the need – and the right – to know about information that affects the safety and security of the flight.”

“CAPA also urges the government to quickly apprehend and prosecute to the full extend of the law the individuals responsible for these recent attacks against commercial flights.”