

Thank you for that introduction, and warm welcome, and thanks for the opportunity to talk to you today about safety.

About nine months ago and shortly after I assumed the role of PHMSA Administrator I had the opportunity to meet and talk with six pilots at a meeting with DOT Secretary Chao about how PHMSA would approach its recently reassigned duties in the Dangerous Goods Panel seat of ICAO.

Those pilots were:

- Tim Canoll,
- Chad Balentine,
- Keith Hagy,
- Steve Jangelis,
- Mark Phaneuf,
- and, Scott Schwartz

And, their focus on airline safety and the safety of ALPA members was razor sharp.

Today, I want to express that it has been a genuine pleasure to work with so many dedicated professionals on improving PHMSA-ALPA collaboration and addressing the risks posed by the shipment of undeclared dangerous goods.

As most of you know (or, as you heard), I am a long-time railroader having worked - however many live-long days there are in 40 years. A few years ago, I would have never imagined myself talking to a group such as this. Making the leap from the bulkiness of the freight rail industry to the sleekness of the airline industry was not something I had personally contemplated, although I had witnessed my long-time colleague and former railroader Oscar Munoz make that transition a few years ago.

But when you think about it, I'm here for the same reasons as you - our strong common bond with safety. And, from what I have witnessed, safety is just as relevant for the engineer at the throttle of a freight train pulling 200 rail cars as it is for the pilot at the controls of an airliner carrying 200 passengers.

I think it makes perfect sense that a Safety Administrator should gravitate toward pilots. Certainly, to some, it seems counter-intuitive that hurtling through the air at several hundred miles per hour, tens of thousands of feet high, in a pressurized tube, is the safest mode of transportation.

But it is. Statistically, about 100 times safer than traveling by car. And, I can tell you that as a confessed safety zealot, I have discovered more than a few kindred spirits among the pilot community.

And clearly, that would not be the case if not for the expertise, the dedication, and the commitment to safety of the airline industry workforce. Airline transportation professionals are clear leaders in the pursuit of both safety awareness and innovation in general, and more specifically when it includes the risks associated with transporting hazardous materials.

That leadership and dedication is why PHMSA, as the only U.S. Safety agency charged with maintaining hazardous materials safety across all transportation modes, wants very much to work closely with and learn from organizations like yours.

We are currently focused on encouraging the implementation of integrated safety management systems – something that your industry has been doing for a long time.

Overall, the safety of operations under PHMSA’s purview is very good, delivering energy and other hazardous materials essential to our daily lives without incident more than 99.999 percent of the time.

But when any incident can result in tragedy, “very good” is just a gentle way of saying “not quite good enough.”

One of PHMSA’s most consistent and important messages is that achieving zero incidents is not impossible.

Our success lies at a very thin margin. But airline safety performance illustrates that an even higher safety success rate can be attained.

There are a number of very safe transportation enterprises – such as pipeline and rail – where the risk is also heightened by the addition of hazardous materials, but airline safety is one of the very few enterprises with a safety record that exceeds the others.

How pilots relate to the inescapable risks of their job is a big part of the reason why. And so, we in the broader hazmat safety business would be foolish not to look to organizations like yours for guidance and leadership.

Innovation is a key part of that leadership, and is a necessary element of further safety improvement beyond the current 99.999 level.

I recently was reminded of that in conversation with Captain Joe DePete, ALPA's National Safety Coordinator, who highlighted that a shift from forensic to risk-predictive analysis in flight safety resulted in an 83 percent decline in the airline industry fatality rate over a ten-year period.

Shortly after that first meeting with ALPA and Secretary Chao, our two groups met again to discuss in more detail the growing concerns about undeclared hazardous materials that are ending up on passenger and cargo aircraft. One quick conclusion was that this issue was not just isolated within the airline industry, but that the potentially harmful impacts caused by undeclared hazardous materials filtered through many other transportation modes.

Out of that meeting emerged other good ideas, one of which led to several facilitated intermodal working group meetings designed to further assess the depth and breadth of the issue.

Hosted by PHMSA, these sessions included participants from the Federal Aviation Administration, Federal Railroad Administration, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

One of the many good recommendations that emerged from these meetings was the need to quickly provide greater industry and public awareness about the hazards associated with undeclared and improperly packaged hazardous materials.

As you are aware, lithium batteries are among the items all too commonly shipped without designation as a dangerous good.

Closing the undeclared hazardous materials gap is a matter of some urgency. For example, the significant consumer demand for lithium batteries has resulted in rapid expansion in their production, supply, and proliferation. Consequently, this hazard is increasing exponentially with global lithium battery production capacity set to double by 2021, according to Bloomberg News Energy Finance.

The lack of industry and public awareness on the rules governing the shipment of lithium batteries poses additional risk across multiple transportation modes, and particularly to shipment of batteries on commercial airliners.

And so the Department of Transportation is rolling out an important new safety awareness initiative called Check the Box, to address these shortcomings.

Cruising altitude certainly is not the place to discover that you are transporting dangerous goods. Shipping dangerous goods without proper designation, packaging, and handling instructions puts people's lives at risk.

In many cases, people shipping dangerous goods are unaware that their package is going to be onboard an aircraft – which makes it unlikely that they will have packaged or prepared it as safely as they should have for that leg of its journey.



Through Check the Box, we hope to achieve greater public and industry awareness of common household items that are classified as hazardous materials and how to safely ship them by educating industry and the public through:

- new dedicated content on our PHMA website,
- social media, and
- at engagement events throughout the country.

To that end, we have created dedicated messaging and a catchy icon named HazMatt – with two T’s I might add – and we are rolling out the initiative at this important safety forum as well as at other major transportation safety events in the coming months.

I hope and believe that such a safety outreach and education effort will, as Captain DePete said, “Close a glaring gap” in safety protocols, and save lives.

And let me re-emphasize, this important new safety initiative would not have become a reality if not for ALPA, and their absolute commitment to improving safety.

I would like to close with one very important point: PHMSA needs your help. Progress in pursuing the last tiny fraction of safety is unlikely to come through more perfect rulemaking, or better enforcement, or any other regulatory function.

Regulation is a core function of PHMSA; but regulation alone will never result in reaching the goal of zero incidents. Such a maximum goal will never be achieved by setting and enforcing minimum standards.

To do that, we must rely on more powerful things than regulation: Collaboration... Communication... Innovation... Teamwork.

As a former industry executive, I have sometimes been cast as closer to industry than a regulator should be. But when the subject is safety, I firmly believe that improvement on the status quo requires that all stakeholders shoulder the responsibility together. Joint effort and collaboration are necessary links in the safety chain. If they are weak, the chain will fail, and preventable incidents will occur.

And, as PHMSA Administrator, I've encountered few groups more receptive to that observation than ALPA.

I know that there are many good reasons that the aviation community is considered the zenith of safety, and that ALPA will help get the Check the Box Safety Awareness Initiative off the ground.

I am also confident that we will find many other ways to work together that can yield tangible safety benefits. I thank you for your time today, for your commitment to safety, and I look forward to working with you all again.