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Ascend: 2009 accidents down but fatalities up

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Last year was "the safest year ever" for airline operations in terms of the rate of fatal accidents, Ascend reported, though it noted that the severity of several accidents resulted in the number of passengers and crew killed increasing "significantly" from 2008.

The UK-based consultancy and information services provider released its annual safety report yesterday, providing assessments for both 2009 and the 10-year period ended Dec. 31. It reported that the fatal accident rate in 2009 was 1 per 1.5 million flights, the best ratio ever recorded. It noted that on this basis flying is "now about twice as safe as in the 1990s." During that decade, the fatal accident rate was 1 per 700,000 flights. The fatal accident rate for the 2000s was 1 per 1.2 million flights.



The number of fatal accidents in 2009 decreased 23% to 23 from 30 in 2008. The 2009 total was 15% below the annual average of 27 for the decade and 40% fewer than the annual average of 37.4 in the 1990s. There were 100 fewer fatal accidents overall in the 2000s than in the 1990s, or 10 fewer per year on average.

But the number of passengers and crew killed in 2009 totaled 732, up 29.1% from 567 in 2008 owing to heavy fatalities in several severe accidents, including the Air France A330 crash in May that killed 228. Still, the 2009 figure was 8% below the annual average of 794 fatalities during the decade and a 35% improvement over the 1990s annual average of 1,128 fatalities.

Overall, there were 10 accidents in 2009 that resulted in fatalities on revenue passenger flights, nearly 25% fewer than the 13 recorded in 2008, Ascend stated. For the 2000s, nearly 8,000 passengers and crew were killed in airline accidents, down 29.1% from the 11,280 deaths in the 1990s. The estimated passenger fatality rate for 2009 was 1 per 4.2 million carried, 27% better than the annual average of 1 per 3.3 million for the 2000s and more than twice as good as the 1 per 1.84 million rate recorded in the 1990s.
by Aaron Karp

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