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Airplane deaths at record low in 2011: report

Air travel has never been safer, agency says

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BY PHILIP CAULFIELD / NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

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TSA screeners at LaGuardia airport. A London-based aviation consultancy found that airplane deaths worldwide were down to historic lows in 2011.

The skies may not be friendlier - but they are safer than ever, according to reports.

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2011 was setting up to be "the best year ever for safety," Paul Hayes, the director of safety for London-based aviation consulting company Ascend told MSNBC.

According to the agency's count, 401 people died on commercial and charter planes in 2011 around the world, down from 726 in 2010.

Some 2.9 billion people fly each year, so the numbers shake out to about one death for every 7.1 million passengers, the lowest totals since the company began tracking global airplane deaths in 1990, MSNBC reported.

The trend mirrors U.S. airline safety performance over the past decade, which was the safest in the country's aviation history, according to an Associated Press analysis of government accident data.

The AP found that 153 people died in American plane accidents, excluding acts of terrorism, from 2001 to 2011, or two deaths for every 100 million passengers on commercial flights.

Between 1991 and 2001, passengers on American planes were ten times more likely to die in an accident, the AP reported.

Experts said better pilots and planes were responsible for the increased safety.

"Aircraft and avionics are better than ever, training is better and we're getting more information on potential danger points because pilots can report mistakes without being punished," aviation consultant and former director of the National Transportation Safety Board Peter Goeltz told MSNBC.

But the trend toward safety didn't apply to all airlines worldwide.

Overall, large airlines in North America, Europe and Asia tend to be the safest to fly, experts said.

"I wouldn't fly Kyrgyzstan Airways or any other "stan" Airways for that matter, and Africa is still a terrible place to fly due to the lack of infrastructure and civil aviation oversight," Goeltz told MSNBC.

The safety reports come after the Federal Aviation Administration announced rule changes on Dec. 21 that would require commercial pilots to sleep at least eight hours a day and get a minimum of ten hours off between flying shifts, up from eight hours.

Pilots would also get 30 consecutive hours off during the week, a 35 percent jump from what current rules require.

The new rules are expected to be rolled out over the next two years.

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I don't fly in airplanes.

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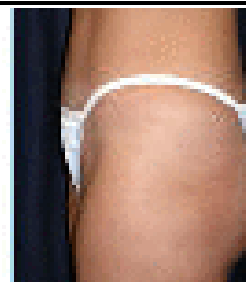
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