

The Australian

A year of flying dangerously as airline safety drops

- Steve Creedy, Aviation writer
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AIRLINE safety took a turn for the worse last year.

New figures show a jump in the global fatal accident rate and a 22 per cent increase in the the number of fatal jet and turboprop crashes.

Figures released by the London-based aviation consultancy Ascend show that the number of fatal accidents on airlines increased from 23 in 2009 to 28 last year.

Ascend said 19 of those involved passenger flights on aircraft of 15 seats or more, up from 10 in 2009.

The number of passenger and crew deaths also rose from 731 in 2009 to 828, while the fatal accident rate rose from one crash per 1.5 million flights to one per 1.3 million flights last year.

But flying in the noughties was still considerably safer than flying in the 1990s, according to Ascend.

Although passenger and crew deaths were 4 per cent higher than the noughties' average of 794 annual deaths, it was a 27 per cent improvement on the 1990s average of 1128 a year.

The fatal accident rate was also significantly better than the 1990s average of one accident per 700,000 flights.

"Despite the relatively poor performance in 2010, we believe that air safety is still improving and this has resulted in 100 fewer accidents in the last decade than in the 1990s - on average, 10 fewer fatal accidents a year," Ascend said in its report.

"Although almost 8000 passengers and crew were killed in airline accidents during the last decade, this is an improvement of some 3300 over the 1990s, which saw 11,280 airline passenger and crew deaths."

Ascend nominated the worst accidents last year as an Air India Express Boeing 737-800 crash in Mangalore in southwest India in May that killed 158 passengers and crew; an Airblue (Pakistan) Airbus A321 July accident in Islamabad that killed 152; and an Afriqiyah (Libya) A330 crash in Tripoli in May in which 104 died.

These accidents and an Ethiopian Airlines crash in Beirut that killed 90 passengers and crew accounted for 65 per cent of total passenger fatalities.

Western-built jets, which carry 90 per cent of the world's passengers, were involved in eight fatal accidents resulting in 554 deaths or almost 70 per cent of the airline total for the year.

Western-built turboprops had 11 fatal accidents, killing 169 passenger and crew, markedly below the 1990s average of 17.5 a year.

Insurers face estimated claims of about \$2.15 billion.