SUSAN PARSON

Editor's Runway

What Does FAA Really Do?

As is true for many pilots, my understanding of what FAA does was fairly vague before I started working here five years ago. It would take a long time to explain everything this agency does, because it's a big organization with big responsibilities to match—and I'm still learning every day.

The articles presented in this issue of the *FAA Aviation News*, though, provide a great way to introduce FAA's responsibilities for some of the functions that are most visible and most directly relevant to the general aviation community: Setting standards, certification, and ensuring continued operational safety. These topics also illustrate how these three functions operate in a cycle of continuous improvement.

Standards

FAA creates and, as necessary, amends rules and regulations that provide the safety standards for people, organizations, and equipment operating in the National Airspace System (NAS). You might be most familiar with the standards (rules) for pilot certification, as outlined in Title14 Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR) part 61 and an associated document you know as the "Practical Test Standards," or PTS, as most of us abbreviate it. For aircraft and their associated parts, products, and appliances, the standards are set through regulations like 14 CFR parts 23 and 43 and described in documents like the Type Certificate Data Sheet (TCDS), Supplemental Type Certificate (STC), and Technical Standard Orders (TSOs), which are featured in this issue's articles.

Articles in this issue introduce FAA's responsibilities for setting standards, certification, and ensuring continued operational safety.

Certification

On the basis of established standards, FAA issues and renews certificates that authorize people, organizations, and equipment to operate in the NAS. Your pilot certificate(s) and ratings are issued to certify that you meet the standards set out in regulations like 14 CFR part 61. As described in several of this issue's articles, FAA also issues and renews certificates that allow manufacturers to build airframes, engines, propellers, components, and parts. Steve Thompson's "Airworthiness 101" article explains Type Certificates, Production Certificates, and Airworthiness Certificates—all of which are based on established standards. FAA also issues the certificates that authorize organizations to provide maintenance services.

Continued Operational Safety

You might be surprised to learn that Continued Operational Safety (COS) is actually the biggest of the three core functions. FAA accomplishes this responsibility through safety surveillance and oversight programs, audits, evaluations, air traffic safety oversight, education and training, research, and accident/incident investigation.

The goal is clear: FAA's COS activities ensure that existing certificate holders continue to meet the safety requirements, standards, and regulations that formed the basis for their original certificate or certificate renewal. COS is also intended to ensure the integrity of a product throughout its service life. To this end, COS involves problem prevention, service monitoring, and corrective actions.

All these actions cycle back into modification of standards, whether for pilot/mechanic certification or for a product's design and production. The STCs and airworthiness directives (ADs) that you read about in this issue's articles illustrate the way FAA's continued operational safety activities can lead to necessary and important modifications to FAA standards.

And so the cycle continues, but always with the ultimate goal of ensuring that we all enjoy safe flights and happy landings.

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