

PEDs In The Cockpit

Living under a rock is the only way you could have missed the recent revolution in the capabilities and widespread acceptance of smart phones and tablet computers. The latter devices—in their Apple iPad form at least—have begun replacing heavy flight bags chock full of charts in favor of one device with aircraft documents, flight-planning software and moving-map capability, all in one.

For commercial operators, the FAA must approve using PEDs like an iPad; non-commercial operators need no such approval. At the same time, the FAA is strongly cautioning operators that “tasks not directly related to required flight duties, including using personal electronic devices (PED), constitutes a safety risk.” It’s all a bit manic-depressive. Meanwhile, smartphones, MP3 players and even DVD/Blu-ray screens are easily plugged into most personal-aircraft intercom systems. And they all can distract the pilot.

In a policy statement issued to commercial operators in 2010, the FAA placed the burden of preventing cockpit distraction squarely on the pilots. “While PEDs can be valuable tools in aviation operations, crewmembers cannot permit PEDs to distract them from focusing on duties and responsibilities related to the flight. Regulations regarding sterile flight decks prohibit crewmembers from performing any duties not relating to the safe operation of the aircraft during critical phases of flight. At other phases of flight, crewmembers must avoid becoming distracted by any task not related to the safe operation of the flight, whether it involves use of a PED or not.”

The agency’s recommendation? “Operators should create a safety culture that clearly establishes guidance, expectations and requirements to control cockpit distractions, including use of PEDs, during flight operations.... Crewmembers should evaluate their personal practices, including those regarding the use of PEDs, to ensure they do not distract from or interfere with duties and responsibilities related to the flight.”

