

Is The WINGS Program Effective?

An internal FAA report of WINGS program effectiveness was completed in September 2011. The report noted the significant changes made in the WINGS program since 2007. It also acknowledged "it was beyond the scope of this study to determine whether it is a pilot's participation in the WINGS Program in and of itself that raises their level of awareness toward risk management, or if the pilots who participate in the WINGS Program already have an effective safety attitude and their participation in the WINGS Program is a natural result of that attitude."

Having acknowledged this up front, the report went on to analyze 3654 accidents from the period 2008-2010. In only 25 (0.68 percent) of these accidents had the pilot earned a phase of the WINGS program. In only 12 of the studied accidents had a pilot completed a current phase of WINGS at the time of the occurrence. One of the report's conclusions, therefore, is that WINGS program participants have a very low incidence of accidents, which is fair. While about 2.5 percent of all pilots have completed a WINGS phase, they are involved in less than one percent of all accidents. But is the WINGS program all that and a bag of chips? Can it be solely responsible for these results? Probably not.

As the report recognized, WINGS participants probably have embraced a safety culture that predisposes them to seek training and apply that training to conduct safer flight operations. The big conundrum is how do we reach the other 97.5 percent of pilots who never



complete a phase of WINGS and the five pilots out of six who have never completed any element of the WINGS program?

