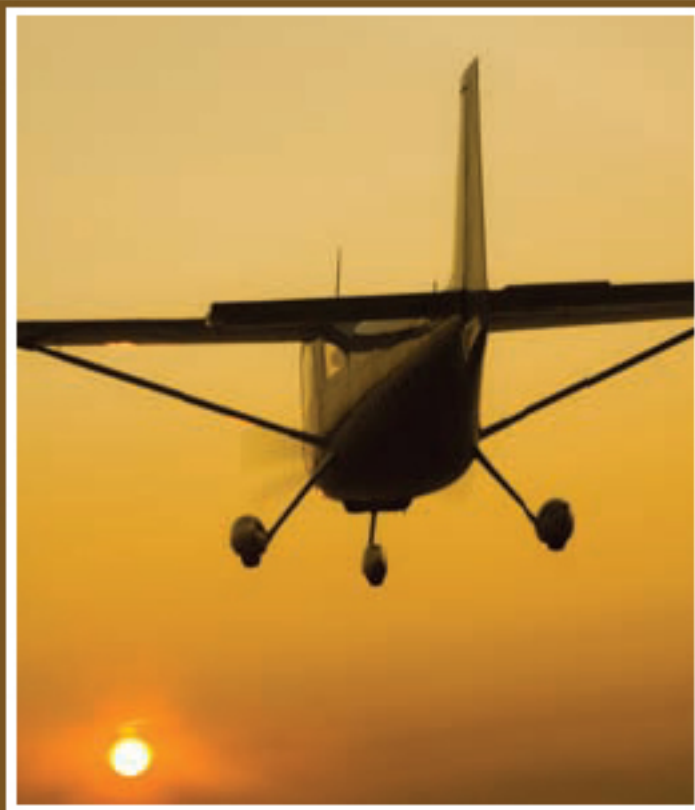


## MECHANICAL CAUSES DRAW SCRUTINY

The higher-than-usual rate of mechanical causes in both fatal light sport accidents and LSA accidents overall may be why the FAA recently announced it is taking another look at the airworthiness standards of light sport aircraft. The announcement came in a June 28, 2012, statement in the *Federal Register* in which the FAA issues a notice of policy and request for comment.

In its statement, the FAA noted, "Based upon its assessment of the special light-sport aircraft (SLSA) manufacturing industry, the FAA is issuing this notice of policy to inform the public of its policy for assessing the accuracy of declarations made in Statements of Compliance Issued for aircraft intended for airworthiness certification as SLSA and to ensure that SLSA conform to identified consensus standards. Additionally, in response to findings noted in its assessment of the SLSA manufacturing industry, the FAA is reiterating its policy regarding the airworthiness certification of SLSA manufactured outside the United States."

To provide a quicker, less expensive means of approving light sport airworthiness and promote the goal of revitalizing general aviation by reducing the cost of flying, the FAA permitted industry to develop its own consensus standards for safety and quality control, instead of imposing traditional, more stringent rules as found in FAR 23. As recently reported in our online sister publication *AVweb*, however:



An FAA assessment of SLSA manufacturers has found that "the majority" of manufacturers evaluated failed to prove compliance with the category's standards, and that could affect the certification status of some aircraft. The FAA announced that "aircraft within the existing fleets" of manufacturers not able to issue a valid Statement of Compliance "may no longer be eligible to retain their airworthiness certification as SLSA." The FAA also noted that a specific range of aircraft (not insignificant in number) may find even less favor from the current regulatory structure. The FAA "has determined that its original policy of reliance on manufacturers' Statements of Compliance"..."should be reconsidered."

Some of the FAA's concern may be more with the paperwork and ongoing engineering monitoring of the LSA fleet. Whatever the cause, however, the fact that almost one-third of light sport accidents result from identifiable mechanical issues either with the airframe or the engine can only heighten the attention FAA pays to manufacturer compliance with the consensus standard.