

Pilots Confront Climate Change

We don't get to decide the weather while we're in our cockpits. It just happens—we prepare for it, and we deal with it. This requires training, experience, and decision-making.



As many of you know by now, I graduated from Parks College of St. Louis University with a degree in meteorology. I went into college thinking I would study aeronautical engineering, but switched after flying the mail for a couple years, when I concluded that while a pilot could not do much about the design of an airplane, he would have to live with the weather every flight.

As I saw it, understanding the elements of the atmosphere and how they interacted would help when facing the challenges of flying through the surprises of weather. Little did I know back then that what I learned about meteorology during my college days would prepare me for the challenges I face as ALPA's President—so much of my work involves making decisions about future events or reacting to sudden turbulence.

Leading ALPA into the burgeoning global debate over carbon emissions is like flying through a line of thunderstorms. Whether you take Al Gore's *Inconvenient Truth* as environmental gospel or simply think that the global warming issue is a scientific theory gone haywire, the fact remains that powerful forces are making decisions that will affect us. We have come

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to a decision point. Should we pick our way through the line of TRWs? Or should we divert? Or choose to sit out the storm and let others drive this decision?

Governments, in North America and abroad, are taking proactive measures to address global warming, air pollution, aircraft noise, and other environmental threats—and the airline industry is on their target list. Whether we like it or not, sweeping changes are going to arrive in the form of technological, operational, and regulatory measures. It is our responsibility to deliver the line-pilot perspective to government agencies and industry organizations responsible for creating and implementing new energy and environmental policies that will affect our operations as well as industry economics.

One prediction that is as easy to forecast as sunshine in

the Sahara is that ALPA will soon find itself at the center of the storm as issues surrounding global warming and the airline industry are developed, debated, and endorsed. To navigate through this particular storm, we have named a new director of Environment and Energy Programs, who will, along with staff, coordinate ALPA's response to the effects of air



transportation on local air quality, on greenhouse-gas levels, on the need for alternative fuels, and on noise pollution. Through this work, ALPA will act in partnership with gov-

ernment agencies and the airline industry to pursue operational, technological, and policy options for both noise and emissions reductions that also maintain safety.

My studies of the dynamics of atmospheric science taught me to examine past patterns, trends, and experience to help predict future events. While this subject is still brewing in the United States, we can learn a lot from our fellow pilots in Europe, who have been addressing these issues for several years now (see "The Enviros Are Coming..." page 17).

The building pressure to confront evolving environmental concerns will force stakeholders to rely on their experience to face this new world, challenging pilots to change the way they fly, aircraft manufacturers to build airplanes in a more efficient manner, chemists and engineers to develop an Earth-friendly fuel that also packs the punch needed to propel passengers safely through the skies, and the already heavily taxed airline industry to confront the possibility of even further revenue drains from international taxation in the forms of emission trading schemes (see "It's Not Easy Flying Green," page 10).

As pilots, we will weather the elements together in this debate. We need to educate ourselves and understand the role that ALPA has played in maintaining safety in the airline industry when others just mouth the words and fight against paying for safety improvements. I committed to studying meteorology because I wanted to know when to go and when to say no. I'm challenging you to find out how the environmental debates will affect the way you operate and command your flights—and how you want your union to respond to this challenge.

