

Innovation in Canadian Aviation Regulations 26/05/2010 9:01 AM

What this? Innovation in aviation regulation, when did that ever take place?

I hope to demonstrate that significant innovation has taken place in Canadian aviation regulation over the last nearly 100 years. The first air regulations were published in 1919 and were contained on one page. The main concern then was dropping things from aircraft. The first world war had just ended so you can understand why dropping things from airplanes were an unpleasant part of it. As happens when an activity is regulated the call soon goes out for more and more regulation. Soon there were regulations for pilot and technician licensing, followed by operating and maintenance rules and then aircraft design standards. Soon every area of aviation had some regulation. The formation of the Department of Transport in 1936 certainly sped up the generation of new rules. Why not? That was one reason they were set up. This trend continued for many years until around the nineteen seventies people began to speak of the regulatory burden. The additional regulations were seen as a barrier to progress. One of the first areas of regulation to feel the pressure were the air carrier economic rules, so economic deregulation was born. This was for some a disaster and for others an opportunity.

Innovation Examples

Some would argue that the very design and implementation of regulations was an innovation which allowed a safe and profitable industry to emerge. I can argue that one as well but I wish to concentrate my points on the last part of the twentieth century.

One innovation was reforming the AME licensing and training program in the late seventies and eighties. The addition of the category "E" licence was an innovation. Prior to that you needed up to three signatures to release avionics work, depending on whether there was any major work involved. The requirement for structured apprenticeships and college training was an innovation. So was the founding of the Canadian Aviation Maintenance Council.

The move from the direct product inspection system of the first half of the twentieth century into quality control, then quality assurance and finally into Safety Management Systems were all innovations.

There were many innovations in the flight operations field as well. You can look at the regulations pertaining to accident investigation and find many examples, such as requiring data recorders and even the formation of an independent accident investigation body. There were many steps towards freedom and innovation in the field of delegations to individuals and companies. Just try and list all the delegations to industry and you will soon fill a page or two.

Some of these innovations were as a result of public inquires some from industry pressure and some from the aviation regulators own staffs work.

Future

I think I have set out why you can say that innovation is not only managerial and technical but also can be in the form of regulatory additions or changes. So what is next?

I respectfully suggest the next innovations need to come in the area of delegation of service work from the regulatory body to industry personnel. The regulatory body may never have sufficient staff to do all the things it is required to do. Even if more staff is added is this the right way to go? Current and future staff in regulatory bodies will always have more work than they can handle.

Delegating more service work to the industry will allow the regulator to carry out their oversight activities. That is where most people would expect them to be, not reviewing manuals and forms. This would allow industry to modify their documents and manuals in a timely manner. This would allow them to keep up to date with technology and human resource requirements. It would be a win-win situation for all concerned, the regulator, industry and the public.