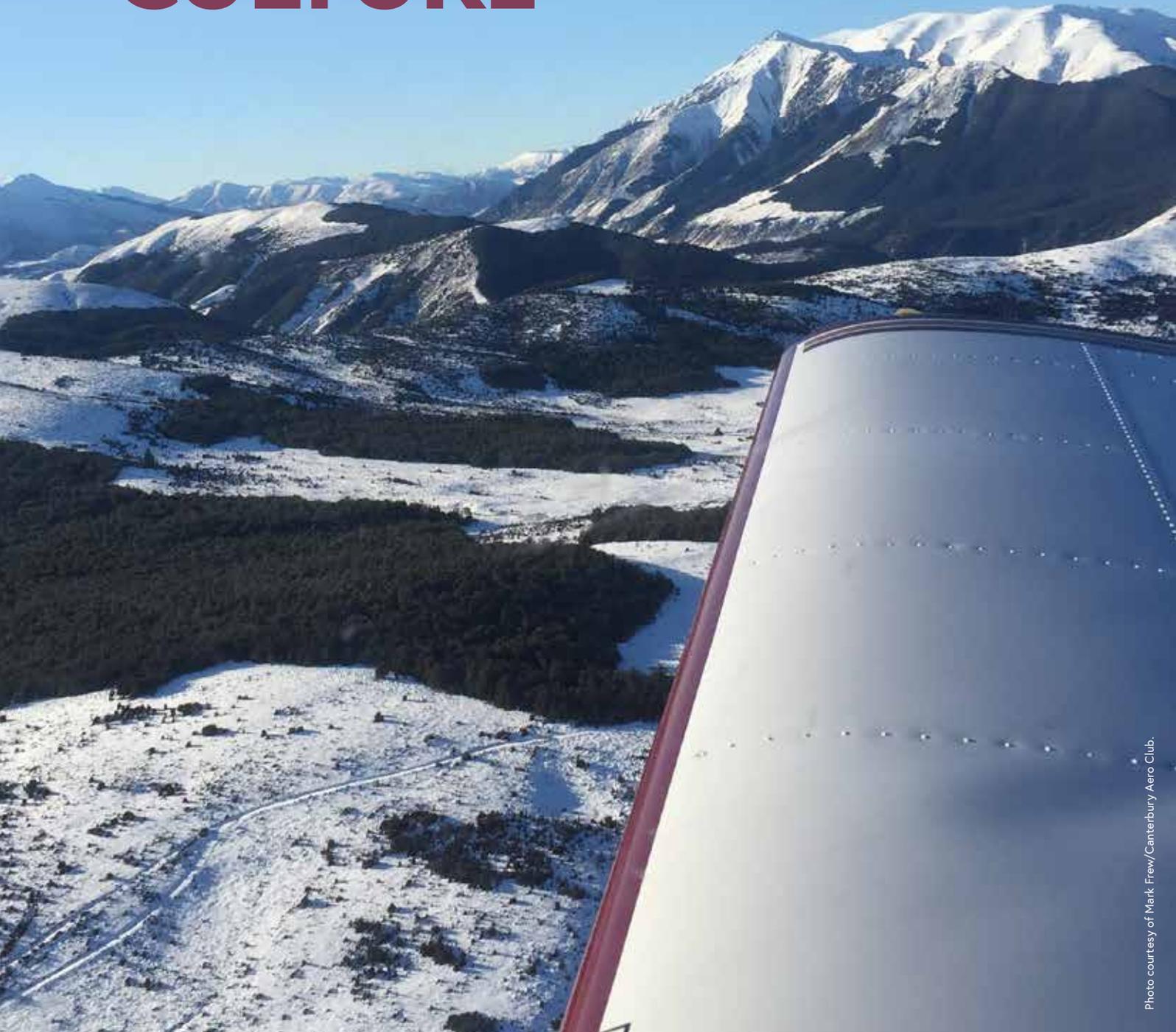


HOW TO BUILD A GREAT REPORTING CULTURE



As part of establishing their Safety Management System, the Canterbury Aero Club built a robust reporting culture in 18 months. Here, they – and other operators – explain what’s important to encourage reporting.



How do you persuade pilots – who’re perhaps reluctant to report a mistake and expose themselves to ridicule – to report an occurrence?

Jeremy Ford, the CEO of Canterbury Aero Club, says you start with yourself.

“Leading from the front means you have to have the right mentality yourself. Only then can you instil the culture needed to deliver the level of safety you’re looking for.”

Jeremy built on the work of the previous chief executive in transforming the reporting culture at Canterbury, knowing that to have an effective Safety Management System (SMS), he had to encourage reporting.

“We wanted to change the attitude that occurrences were something you just tried to forget had happened, to things that were opportunities to learn, to contribute to future safety.

“We emphasised that reporting would help us fix the system that had allowed the occurrence to happen in the first place.”

Jeremy says members of the aero club, and students at the club’s international aviation academy, were assured any reports could be done with complete anonymity.

“I have no idea who has submitted a report. Sometimes I’ll put the word out that I’d like to talk to the ‘reporter’ and sometimes they will come and have a chat. Sometimes they won’t – and we honour that. We don’t push.”

Words matter

Jeremy and his safety systems manager, Stephanie Schwabe, also reassured hesitant aero club members and academy students their occurrence would not be treated as a ‘breach’ of anything.

“Words are important, so we renamed the ‘Problem Report’ the ‘Occurrence and Improvement Report’ reflecting the emphasis on improving safety.”

Such encouragement of reporting can, at the start, lead to an embarrassment of riches.

Stephanie says as the reporting culture takes hold, there can be some fairly trivial ones.

“Nevertheless, people who report have to see their occurrence is being investigated and they want to know what happens as a result.

“The first time you don’t bother to examine an event is the point at which you lose their engagement.

“Once things settle down, people get a better idea of what is reportable. You start to get some really good data.” »

// BUILDING REPORTING

- Make it easy to report.
- Apply just culture principles.
- Encourage open reporting (with the option of anonymity to reassure reluctant reporters).
- Investigate every report.
- Keep the emphasis on what can be learned.
- Make it clear what happened as a result of the report.

Stephanie says the 18-month period in which it took to improve reporting reflects the longest course the academy provides.

“So the students were taking on the reporting culture, the instructors were taking on the reporting culture, and they were taking that next door to the aero club.

“The turnover in staff in that 18 months also contributed, because we had an intake of new employees who’d only ever experienced a strong reporting culture.”

The role of just culture

Shaun Seddon, the deputy SMS manager at the International Commercial Pilot Academy in Whanganui, describes what happened when students came face-to-face with a just culture.

“Student representatives attend our regular safety meetings. At one, they told us about an occurrence that sounded pretty hair-raising, that hadn’t been reported formally. They’d just heard about it from other students.

“We called a students’ meeting and said there’d be no flying until a formal report had been logged.

“But we also said no one would be in trouble; we just had to get the details on what happened so we could make sure it didn’t happen again. We talked a lot about ‘just culture’ principles.

“The next day, the formal report was logged – and so were a few others. They didn’t get in trouble, as we promised. We went from about five reports a month to about 30.

“As it turned out, the original story had become embellished as it had gone round the students. When we investigated the circumstances described in the formal report, we realised there was no real risk at all.

“The more important thing was that it gave us an opportunity to reassure the students they would not be in hot water if they reported.”

Shaun says there’s another reason for the increased rate of reporting.

“The students are keen to see trends in occurrences. We were able to explain the direct link between reporting and being able to identify trends.

“So they were keen to be a part of that as well.”

Pearce Bennett, Chief Pilot of Skydiving Kiwis in Ashburton, believes the younger generation of participants may be more at home with regular reporting than the older generation.

“I think the introduction of just culture principles, recognising that humans will make mistakes, has meant a change in attitude,” Pearce says.

// JUST CULTURE PRINCIPLES

- Workers are encouraged, even rewarded, for providing essential safety-related information.
- Disciplining human error is inappropriate and counter-productive to reporting.
- Safety failures and incidents are used as lessons to avoid more serious events.
- Workers are clear about where the line is drawn between blameless mistakes, and negligent, reckless, repeated, and/or intentionally wilful unsafe acts.

“These days, everyone is far more interested in information-gathering and education, than in penalising someone for a mistake anyone could make.”

It’s generally accepted that leading up to a major occurrence there are about 400 minor ones.

“So you deal with those minor ones so they don’t get a chance to become the major one,” says Pearce.

As an example, he describes a recent report from a tandem master.

“He opened his parachute and found one of the brake lines wasn’t correctly stowed; it came loose after the parachute was deployed.

“So he reported it, no big deal, and it was just, ‘oh sweet, we can deal with that’. We were training a new packer so we just gave them a bit more guidance, particularly about maintaining vigilance, and now it’s all good.”

Involving the staff

Miriam Stevenson, CEO of Skywork Helicopters in north Auckland, says having the reporter involved in developing the solution has also been successful in building a healthy reporting system.

“It’s great if the reporter, not management, comes up with the solution. If they’re experienced, they know what better option they could have taken. If they’re inexperienced, it might take a bit of help to come to a viable solution.

“It’s important they don’t feel like they report, then go about their business, and management will decide what to do.”

Miriam says reported incidents and near misses are also treated as learning opportunities for everyone, and solutions are often generated through a team approach.

“That approach means everyone gets the one message, and it helps them feel like they ‘own’ the issue, the answer, and the responsibility to act, so it doesn’t crop up again.

“We have a very co-operative organisation – no management versus workers thing – and everybody gets involved in safety and the reporting process.

“It varies between people as to how much they report. But we have built an environment where reporting is done more and more.

“That’s not to say nothing is ever disciplined. If someone is indicating they don’t care what they could have done to themselves or others, or what they cost the company, then yes, that’s disciplined.

“But usually we have the ‘good conversation’ first – before it ever gets to that point.”

Reporting to the CAA

Some participants who’ve reported to the CAA in the past have complained they never know what happens to their report.

The managers of Intelligence, Safety and Risk Analysis (ISRA), and Safety Investigation both look at every report – all 8000-odd of them, every year!

In the March/April 2017 issue of *Vector*, ISRA’s manager, Jack Stanton, said this:

“We really appreciate that reporting is increasing. Eighty percent of our intelligence work is based on reports, and good descriptions are essential to making sense of those reports.”

The CAA’s analysts pore over the data to identify spikes in types of accidents, say, at a certain time of year, or trends over time.

“I’m aware that some people think their report has fallen in a black hole, because they don’t hear much back,” says Jack. “But I can assure them every report is looked at, and those that are part of a trend will be valuable to our assessment of risk and safety.”

CAA analyst Joe Dewar liaises with the helicopter and adventure aviation sectors to improve the awareness of participants about where risk is concentrated. That work is based on participants’ reporting.

Reporting underpins the quarterly and six-monthly safety reports (caa.govt.nz, “Aviation Info > Safety Info > Safety Reports”) summarising occurrences in each sector.

The analysts also produce ‘mini’ safety reports for each sector, improving the understanding of each of the CAA’s operational units of where best to concentrate resources.

Reporting enables safety investigators to analyse what contributed and led up to occurrences, combining that information with other safety data, to identify any ‘themes’ in the occurrences and what they might have in common.

All this valuable information begins with participants’ reports. 

// REPORTING MYTH

Here’s an excerpt from the May/June 2016 *Vector* article, “Just Culture and Reporting”, in which the Director described the CAA’s attitude to reporting.

“If an incident has resulted from human error, it’s pointless to punish the person involved. It’s human to make mistakes, we all do it. So the CAA’s approach is to support the person, learn from the information provided, improve the system if we can, and move on.”

Graeme Harris is aware there’s an ‘urban myth’ behind much of the failure to self-report: that reporting an occurrence means the person involved will likely end up in court.

“The stats, however, don’t bear that out. Over the last five years, the CAA has received about 32,500 reports and complaints, from the public, from industry, from CAA personnel. In that time there have been just 79 prosecutions.

“I don’t believe there is any rational basis for a pilot, for instance, to worry about sanction if they report an incident they caused.

“I cannot recall any prosecution taken over an incident during the last five years, where the CAA learned about it only through a report by the person involved.

“If anyone knows from personal experience of such a case, I invite them to email me.”

In the two years since that article was published, Graeme has never received such an email.

The easiest way to report an occurrence to the CAA is online, www.caa.govt.nz/report.

Look up Part 1 of the Civil Aviation Rules to read definitions of an accident, serious incident, and incident.

The *How to Report Occurrences* booklet is available free by emailing info@caa.govt.nz.

