



**By William Garvey**   
*William Garvey is Editor-in-Chief of Business & Commercial Aviation. Join the conversation at: [AviationWeek.com/IBA](http://AviationWeek.com/IBA) [william.garvey@aviationweek.com](mailto:william.garvey@aviationweek.com)*

**COMMENTARY**

## Confessions Welcome

### Business aviation joins the ‘Oops-sorry’ program

It's surprising to me that a dozen national governments have willingly institutionalized “blind-eye” policies in the name of safety. Specifically, they have established voluntary reporting programs under which they grant confidentiality and, for the most part, immunity to pilots, mechanics and others who report safety concerns or confess to violating aviation regulations. The governments' rationale is that by putting such policies in place, reporters will be more willing to come forward and potentially expose unknown, systemic flaws, which only then can be corrected.

That is a rather generous approach for any government entity, but it works and has for decades. Mind you, not all errors are protected and forgiven. Typically, reports involving criminal activity, intentional falsification, recklessness, repeated offenses, drug or alcohol impairment or actual accidents typically lose the veil of anonymity and protection from disciplinary action.

But today in the U.S., Aviation Safety Action Programs (ASAP) are embraced by operators and the FAA alike and now feed information into the safety data pool at a substantial rate. Those reports have helped reveal unexpected trends, air traffic control and procedural shortcomings, and equipment confusion or unwelcome behavior, among other things.

Every report submitted is considered by members of an Event Review Committee (ERC), one of whom represents the operator, another the FAA and a third the employee group. They weigh the details and decide—by consensus always—what action, if any, should be taken. The report is then identified and added to the database, which is available to all participants.

While ASAPs have had their doubters and opponents—there are careers at the center, after all—over the decades the bumps have been

accessible to participants, each of whom would have their own server as well. The agency liked the idea, and the foundation's ASAP launched in 2012.

Since then, 31 FAR135 operators have signed on to the program and are contributing reports regularly. But almost simultaneously with the ACSF's effort, word was spreading among FAR91 business aircraft operators that Boeing's internal flight operation had created an ASAP independently and was well satisfied with it.

Accordingly, corporate operators began contacting the ACSF to see if they might be able to sign on to its ASAP program as well, even though they did

not offer charter services. Since the more business aircraft and operations data the better, the ACSF welcomed them, with the provision that they become foundation members.

Today, the ACSF has 32 business aviation ASAP members, including such top-notch operators as 3M Corp., Harley-Davidson, Hewlett Packard, Baxter Healthcare, Cargill Corp., Deere & Co., Harris Teeter, Kroger, Monsanto and Joe Gibbs Racing, among them. Additional companies are expected to join the program in the near future.

Russ Lawton, the ACSF's director of Safety and ASAP head, says: “We've had a lot of interest [in the ASAP]. It could double [in participants]. We're pleasantly surprised.”

He notes that the program has generated more than 800 reports to date—a paltry figure compared to those generated by large carriers, but an important contribution from the business aviation segment. He also points out that 90% of all ASAP reports are “soul source,” that is, only the reporter knew of the transgression.

“So,” he says, “we're learning stuff we would not have known about otherwise.” Which is the whole point of creating ASAPs in the first place. It seems confession is not only good for the soul, but for enhancing aviation safety as well.

Top 10 Event Categories by ACSF's ASAP Reporters		
Item	Number Reported	Percentage*
1 Altitude Deviation	106	23.4
2 Navigation/Position Control	58	12.8
3 ATC Complications/Errors	56	12.3
4 Non-Compliance with CFRs, Policies Procedures	45	9.9
5 Traffic Proximity	40	8.8
6 Aircraft System/Equipment Malfunction	30	6.6
7 Fuel Event	26	5.7
8 Speed Deviation	14	3.0
9 Cabin Events	12	2.6
10 Approach/Arrival Event	12	2.6

\*Of 452 events reported Source: Air Charter Safety Foundation

smoothed and the programs have had wide buy-in. They are most popular among air carriers, but large charter and fractional ownership operators also participate.

Left out of the system, however, were small charter and business aircraft operations. After all, setting up an ASAP requires signed agreements among all involved, including each FAA region, a time-consuming process that small operators cannot justify.

Unsatisfied with that exclusion, the Air Charter Safety Foundation (ACSF) approached the FAA, offering to create a web-based ASAP for its members that it would manage, promote and facilitate and for which it would maintain a dedicated aggregate server