



AIRLINE SAFETY RATINGS

The Issue

A number of companies produce reports purporting to rate/rank airlines against one another according to their level of safety. Because no objective criteria or metrics exist by which it is possible to do this, these organizations will use a variety of subjective “yardsticks” to compare airlines. These typically include the number of accidents and/or serious incidents experienced by an airline over a given period. Information is usually drawn from publicly available sources such as the news media. The exact formulas for determining the rankings may or may not be made available for examination and analysis.

IATA's Position

IATA does not consider airline safety ratings or rankings to be a valid measure of an individual organization's safety performance. Furthermore, IATA does not believe that aviation safety should become a competitive issue as it would violate the industry's position that safety is the highest priority of all involved in aviation. The extraordinary safety performance of commercial air transport is in large part owing to the strong spirit of cooperation on safety-related issues among airlines, manufacturers, government regulators and other stakeholders.

Specific factors that make airline ratings a highly speculative exercise providing no value to air travelers include the following:

Small data samples give big swings in the accident rate

- Airline accidents, especially fatal accidents, are extremely rare. Large variations in rates can result from a single event.

Accountability for an accident is not clear cut

- External factors and events involving non-airline participants (i.e. aircraft manufacturers, airports, air navigation service providers, ground handling companies, etc.) can contribute to an accident or incident.

A simple ranking cannot give a complete safety picture

- The severity of the accident has to be judged and taken into account in a ranking system, yet the severity of an accident is often affected by external conditions and events.
- It is very difficult to offer a precise weighting of results by timescale and size of airline, especially noting that airlines change operating fleets, destinations, and many other characteristics on an on-going basis.

A ranking approach attributes responsibility for accidents and incidents solely to an airline, regardless of other contributing factors. This violates a key principal of safety research, which recognizes that most accidents involve a chain of events that may involve multiple participants. For these reasons, airline safety rankings are inherently flawed.