

## BASIC QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE MAXIMUM AGE LIMIT FOR AIR CARRIER PILOTS

Increased public attention is focused on the background which led the Federal Aviation Agency to issue the regulation on the maximum age limit for air carrier pilots. Some of the basic questions asked about this timely topic are covered here as follows:

Q. WHAT PROMPTED FAA TO PROPOSE THE MAXIMUM AGE LIMIT FOR AIRLINE PILOTS?

A. Consideration for public safety. (This is consistent with the specific responsibility assigned to the FAA Administrator by Congress.) In the Federal Aviation Act of 1958, which created this Agency, Congress provided specific guidelines to be followed by the Administrator in prescribing standards, rules and regulations affecting air carriers. Congress requires that "the Administrator shall give full consideration to the duty resting upon air carriers to perform their services with the highest possible degree of safety in the public interest..." and "The Administrator shall exercise and perform his powers and duties under this Act in such manner as will best tend to reduce or eliminate the possibility of, or recurrence of, accidents...."

Q. HAS IT BEEN DEMONSTRATED THAT AGE IS A FACTOR IN THE OCCURRENCE OF AIR CARRIER ACCIDENTS?

A. No. Fortunately there are very few air carrier accidents. There are also, at present, very few air carrier pilots in the older age brackets ---around 40 of them 60 or over, for example. As a consequence, it would take quite a number of accidents before we would have proof of a relationship to the age of the pilots involved.

Q. THEN, WHAT BASIS DO YOU HAVE FOR LIMITING THE AGE OF AIR CARRIER PILOTS:

A. The general knowledge of what happens to all humans as they grow older has been applied to a specific group of humans --- air carrier pilots. From the general knowledge of the processes of aging it is apparent that the functions which make up the skills required of airline pilots begin to deteriorate well before the age of 60.

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Q. HOW MANY PILOTS WILL BE AFFECTED BY THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MAXIMUM AGE OF 60?

A. At present there are approximately 40 air carrier pilots aged 60 or over. The number who will be in this age range is increasing steadily, however. For example, it is estimated that in 8 more years there would be 250 active air carrier pilots over 60. Many others over 60 would have retired voluntarily or for other reasons would no longer be serving as air carrier pilots. 8 years ago there were none who had reached age 60. This is a reflection of the age of the air carrier industry itself ---- pilots have grown old with it.

Q. ISN'T IT TRUE THAT PERSONS VARY CONSIDERABLY IN THE RETENTION OF THEIR SKILLS AS THEY GROW OLDER? WHY CAN'T YOU INDIVIDUALIZE AND ELIMINATE ONLY THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECTED BY THE AGING PROCESS?

A. Everyone ages. The individual functions may decline at a different rate in the same individual. Since we are talking about changes in a multiplicity of individual functions, psychological and physiological, which collectively contribute to the skills of piloting aircraft safely, it is apparent that a precise assessment of the combined effect of multiple deteriorations would be difficult. As a matter of fact, in the present state of knowledge, the extent and significance of individual impairments cannot be measured with any degree of accuracy.

Q. IT APPEARS THAT BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF KNOWLEDGE NECESSARY TO INDIVIDUALIZE, YOU HAVE DECIDED ON AN ARBITRARY AGE CUT-OFF. IS THERE A PRECEDENT FOR SUCH ACTION BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT?

A. To our knowledge the Federal government has not previously set a maximum age limit for any group in private industry. Because of the safety considerations involved in air carrier operations, it is not surprising that the FAA is currently involved. It is interesting to note that of the large European airlines queried one has a compulsory retirement age of 60 for its pilots; the others compel pilots to retire at age 55.

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DOES THE RECENT INTRODUCTION OF JET AIRCRAFT ADD TO THE URGENCY OF ESTABLISHING A MAXIMUM AGE LIMIT?

To a certain extent, yes. Because of the seniority system which exists in the air carrier industry the older more senior pilots have first choice of the newer aircraft and the added benefits and prestige associated with flying them. As a consequence, the average age of jet pilots today is considerably higher than the average age of all airline pilots. When you consider the faster speeds, higher altitudes and greater numbers of passengers carried per plane, it is apparent that the operation of these planes is more critical and there is responsibility for an increased number of lives in any given flight.

2. WILL IT EVER BE POSSIBLE TO INDIVIDUALLY SELECT PILOTS WHO WILL BE SAFE TO CONTINUE BEYOND AGE 60?

1. Not in the immediate future. For example, with the state of knowledge at present, despite millions being spent in medical research, the prediction of incapacity from heart disease in an apparently healthy individual is almost always impossible. Such incapacity occurs with a greatly increased frequency beyond the age of 40. One large industrial organization, which has an outstanding medical department and preventive medicine program for its employees, found that 85% of the workers suddenly incapacitated by heart attacks had been found free of any indication of such a condition in the preceding medical examination accomplished within six months to a year before the attack.

We hope that, as medical knowledge advances, ability to select on an individual basis will improve to the point where arbitrary rules will not be necessary. Since the creation of the FAA, considerable attention has been given to the development of a medical program which will meet the needs of the Agency's overall safety program. As knowledge which can be applied to pilots is developed by the Office of the Civil Air Surgeon and by medical researchers generally, it will be utilized in support of air safety. Studies of the effects of aging as applied to pilots have been given high priority.

