



In the Middle of the Night, Who Ya Gonna Call?

On a dark and stormy night, a flight crew puts the flying machine on the slippery pavement in a strong, gusty crosswind. The flying machine refuses to act like a land vehicle and slides off into the gumbo, despite the captain's best efforts to play "Bet Your Certificate" by finessing rudder pedals, nose-wheel steering, and thrust reversers.

Half an hour later, the captain pulls out his cell phone, starts punching buttons, and prepares to explain what happened.

Moments later, ALPA staff engineer Joe Bracken, asleep in his home in northern Virginia, awakens to the sound of a cell phone ringing.

"Ah, yeah, hi," says the pilot on the other end of the line. "Uh, I'm on a layover in Hawaii right now, and I moved a couple of weeks ago, and I just realized, I haven't informed ALPA of my change of address."

What's wrong with this picture? Two things: The captain involved in the runway excursion called the company to report the accident, but the little orange card ALPA gave him years ago stayed snugly bedded between the other cards in his wallet. On the other hand, the pilot safely on a layover used the "orange card" inappropriately to communicate with the Association about something that was not a time-critical safety matter.

Every ALPA member should have "the orange card" in his or her possession while flying. The card tells how to reach and use the ALPA Worldwide Accident/Incident Hotline, which the Association has had in place for many years to handle *time-critical safety and security needs* of ALPA members. Someone is standing by to answer a call to the Hotline every minute of every day, and the service accepts collect calls from anywhere in the world.

The ALPA staff folks who carry and answer the ALPA Hotline phone, however, have many tales to tell of

ALPA Worldwide Accident Hotline

IF YOU ARE INVOLVED IN AN AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT OR INCIDENT,
IMMEDIATELY CALL THE HOTLINE FOR ASSISTANCE

(202) 797-4180 (Collect Calls accepted)
(703) 892-4180 (Backup number)

During non-business hours, your call will be answered by an answering service. **DO NOT HANG UP.** You will be connected to an ALPA Air Safety Representative.



- MAKE NO STATEMENTS TO ANYONE OUTSIDE ALPA.
- Keep the crew together.
- Obtain medical attention for the crew, if necessary.
- Obtain rest facilities away from the scene for ALL crew members involved.
- Inform ALPA of the crew's location.
- MAKE NO STATEMENTS TO ANYONE OUTSIDE ALPA.

FOR NON-TIME CRITICAL SAFETY ISSUES, CALL THE ALPA AIR SAFETY NUMBER: (800) 424-2470

Every ALPA member should have the orange card in his or her possession while flying. The card tells how to reach and use the ALPA Worldwide Accident/Incident Hotline.

**ALPA WORLDWIDE
ACCIDENT/INCIDENT HOTLINE**

(202) 797-4180 (USA)

Backup Number: **(703) 892-4180 (USA)**

Call for immediate assistance if you are involved in an aircraft accident or incident (collect calls accepted)

For any other non-time-critical safety or security issues, call the ALPA Engineering and Air Safety Department
TOLL FREE at 1-800-424-2470 (U.S. & Canada)

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apparent cases of rank-and-file ALPA members misunderstanding what the Hotline is for and how to use it. Every ALPA member should understand the Hotline's purpose, capability, and limitations.

Chris Baum, manager of the Engineering and Accident Investigation section of ALPA's Engineering and Air Safety Department, explains that "if you call the Hotline during non-business hours, you'll first reach an answering service, so keep in mind that they are not airplane people. They follow a checklist that we give them that connects you with an ALPA per-

son. We use an answering service because it gives us the best bang for the buck. It's in the business of answering phones for people.

"The answering service uses the same checklist—*all the time*. This means that the folks at the answering service can try lots of numbers so *you* don't have to—but it also means you'll have to hold for a minute or two."

The answering service operator first calls the duty engineer who's carrying the dedicated cell phone that week. The Hotline duty rotates through a list of 17 staff engineers, including Baum, the other managers in the Department,

and Keith Hagy, the Department director. The duty engineer carries the Hotline cell phone 24 hours per day until his or her duty week is up.

If the answering service operator doesn't get the duty engineer on the phone right away, he or she then works down the list of the other staff engineers until one answers.

"So two numbers times two lines per number means your call gets answered," Baum explains. "Their equipment, plus our procedures, means you get a live person on the other end of the line—not voice mail. You *will* be connected to an ALPA person, no matter when you call.

"By the way," Baum adds, "regardless of the nature of your call, you'll be connected with an ALPA safety person, who may be in the car, in a meeting, in the shower, in the middle of dinner, sleeping, mowing the lawn, or feeding the dog. The safety person will put these matters aside to help you, but your patience will be appreciated!"

O.K., so now you've been connected to an ALPA staff engineer—an experienced professional who is *not* part of your MEC but *does* regularly work with your MEC Central Air Safety Committee. He or she is *not* connected with your airline, but *does* understand your relationship to your company. The engineer on duty also is not a doctor, counselor, or member of the clergy. He or she is *not* a lawyer—but *can* put you in touch with one.

So what can the ALPA staff engineer do for you? He or she "understands air carrier operations, can contact lots of people about lots of stuff, and has done this before," Baum points out. "The staff engineer is your direct, human conduit to ALPA's resources to help you deal with your situation."

And how does that work?

"You can initially plan on spending a while on the phone—maybe 10 or 20 minutes," Baum explains. "You

Calling ALPA

The ALPA Worldwide Accident/Incident Hotline number is **202-797-4180**; the backup number is **703-892-4180**. Collect calls are accepted at both numbers. Issues that are *not* time-critical may be better handled during the business day when the entire ALPA staff is available to help. The number to call during normal business hours is 1-888-FLY-ALPA (359-2572).

If you're making a statement—either verbal or written—to your airline or a regulatory authority, *first* get ALPA to review it by calling the toll-free ALPA air safety reporting line, 1-800-424-2470, between 8:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Eastern time, or the Hotline at the numbers given above. ➔

can plan on getting the help you need, or a good vector to it. You can plan on being asked lots of questions related to the situation, and getting lots of advice. Think of your call to the ALPA Hotline being the beginning of a process, not the end."

He adds, "If you have a problem [in the airplane], fly the airplane until the last part stops moving. See to the safety and well-being of your passengers and crew. Then call ALPA—we'll help you with the company, the FAA, Transport Canada, the NTSB, and the TSBC. Don't be the guy who has a problem, spills his guts to the company, the FAA, and the NTSB, and then calls ALPA 'to see if there's anything else I need to do.'"

In 2005, pilots made 770 calls to the Hotline. Of those, only 232 calls (30 percent) involved a time-critical safety or security issue. The rest were

for legal, representation, aeromedical, and administrative issues.

"We have received calls asking about prescription drugs, wanting to reset a website password, or saying, 'I just remembered a call from the FAA last week,'" Baum adds. "We've also received calls from someone who needed a membership pin, or answers about an airline merger. Others have included questions about flight time or duty time issues ('Oh, by the way, I'm pushing back now—am I legal?')."

Baum says the ALPA Hotline is "like any other system—it's most effective when used as designed. Would you declare an emergency to get current weather?"

Not uncommon is the type of call in which the caller says, in effect, "I have a problem, but I'm not going to tell you what it is or who I am!"

Regarding that type of call, Baum says, "The Hotline folks will do our best to help, but we can't help if we don't know you have a problem."

Particularly vexing are the cases in which the flightcrew members *should* have called, but didn't. These situations have included runway incursions, deviations from altitude or route clearances, an emergency landing with no hydraulics, a tail strike under investigation by the NTSB, a high-speed rejected takeoff with a wheel fire, and a B-747-400 with broken landing gear, all of which ALPA safety people found out from outside news sources.

So if you harbor even the slightest shred of doubt about whether to use this important ALPA resource, call the Hotline. Skydivers enjoy an old joke about how to decide when to use the reserve parachute: "When in doubt, whip it out!" The same holds for the orange card: When in doubt, whip it out, and start punching telephone buttons. Operators, as the TV ads say, are standing by.—*Jan W. Steenblik, Technical Editor*