

What is the *Circle of Safety* Consumer Education Program?

As the agency designated by Congress to oversee aviation safety, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) acknowledges that there are many individuals and groups who share responsibility for preventing accidents. Safety is like a circle in which these various players contribute through education, operation, maintenance and regulation. Pilots have responsibility for making decisions about the flight and for maintaining their skills, for example. The FAA sets rules for the operation of aircraft and airports and provides services to the flying public. Passengers occupy a position in the circle. They can influence aviation practices.

Over the past decade Alaska has averaged 35 commercial accidents per year. Many of those accidents resulted in fatalities, and those losses take an emotional toll on all of us. The Circle of Safety is our new consumer education program that results from the continuing need to prevent and reduce aviation accidents. It was developed in partnership with Alaskans who fly and who operate air services. Every year the agency spends millions of dollars to build new runways, install navigation aids, lighting and other equipment, to train pilots and to enforce the regulations. While those efforts are important, informed and alert consumers can also be influential in making flying safer in Alaska.

Because aviation is so important to Alaskans, the FAA urges passengers to become active participants in the Circle of Safety. This may be a new idea for aviation consumers who see the pilot as the captain of the ship and the ultimate decision maker. While that is in fact the pilot's role, there are many factors that can contribute to how a pilot operates an aircraft, including pressure from paying passengers to get them to their destination.

Air carrier selection is one means of exercising control over the risk involved in travel. A number of private corporations have set their own standards for selecting an air carrier that meet or exceed the Federal regulations. They have adopted policies and procedures to minimize risk to their employees who travel. But countless other government agencies, school districts and businesses do not have written policies or aviation coordinators. By adopting standards and educating passengers about their rights and responsibilities when flying, organizations can provide a support system that arms passengers with the knowledge to be proactive about their own safety.

To share the concept of the Circle of Safety, we have developed the enclosed materials touching on the basic FAA Regulations. There are sample policies from organizations that have established standards concerning aviation services. There is a job description for an Aviation Coordinator to implement the policy, guide in the selection of air carriers, and train passengers to be more alert to safety practices when flying. As consumers we can promote increased aviation safety through our choices.

FAA Flight Standards Division personnel will be available upon request to discuss this program and provide assistance. We look forward to working with you to improve aviation safety since flying is a very enjoyable, exciting, and necessary form of transportation in Alaska.