ORANGE is the new BLACK

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No, I am not speaking of the Netflix show, I am speaking about a new color that will debut soon across all U.S. airports. Orange—a universal symbol of construction or caution. The color will be a change to the way business is done.

We always have two seasons at airports: winter and construction. Airport infrastructure funding has not declined over the past five years; it has in fact reversed the trends of other infrastructure investments by our government and increased. In turn, we will see many more construction projects arriving at airports here in NYC as well as around the United States. One common thread we are seeing in the safety trends is that pilots, airports, and air traffic controllers are missing key NOTAMS, which has led to aircraft taxiing into, over, and through construction areas and barricades and even taking off and landing into closed areas on runways. The blame could go around all day long, but one thing is certain—it is a trend ALPA is trying to combat and reverse by working with all stakeholders at the FAA, airports, and airlines.

We as pilots are adapted to ambers, blacks, reds, and whites on our ground signage and lighting, but the FAA, along with ALPA’s Airport and Ground Environment Group, have come up with orange to highlight the areas that are undergoing work and maintenance. The signs will be temporary in nature so they can be moved from spot to spot, but will be in the same signage font and block you are used to. These signs are unlit but will be reflective and placed in areas where construction could include a taxiway closure, ramp resurfacing, and, most importantly, a runway cutback. If a runway cutback is to occur, an orange “Runway Distance Remaining” and the amount in feet will be placed at the hold line. Working in conjunction with the NOTAMS, the ATIS, the orange signage, and the “shortened” terminology from ATC, we are taking on the threat of a major accident by creating mitigations to draw the risk to zero.

by Steve Jangulis
ALPA National Airport and Ground Environment Chairman, NYC7ERB
The orange signs were first tested at the FAA Technical Center in Atlantic City, N.J., then tested at smaller airports for logistics and Airport Operations testing, and were fully reviewed by ALPA Airport and Ground Environment pilot volunteers prior to the larger-scale testing due to take place here at JFK and at ORD. Final rulemaking and deployment after successful testing will be implemented by the FAA prior to the end of the year.

Although ALPA agrees with this design standard and has been a part of this project since it was a tabletop discussion, we need your help. You, as line pilots, can offer an opinion of these signs and let us know if what we have designed is clear, concise, contrasting, and easy to adapt into your daily workings on the airport surface. Any input would be greatly appreciated, and will be assembled, deidentified, and included in ALPA’s comments toward the final development and rollout of these orange construction signs. Please forward any and all comments to Steve.Jangelis@alpa.org. I fly the system, but I don’t get the benefit of the thousands of eyes out flying the line delivering our passengers and cargo safely and professionally, and I thank you for any input you may have. As always, if you see any airport issues involving airport lights, markings, wildlife, NOTAMs (be gentle), or runway safety, please e-mail and let us know how we can help.

Steve Jangelis is the ALPA National Airport and Ground Environment chairman and is the industry co-chairman for the FAA’s Root Cause Analysis Team and a member of the FAA’s Runway Safety Council and FAA’s Airport Construction Advisory Council.