Civil Aviation Authority of New Zealand

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MEDIA RELEASE
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Civil Aviation Authority Presents Carbon Monoxide Detectors to Aircraft Operators

Recognising the hazard posed by carbon monoxide in an aircraft cockpit, the Civil Aviation Authority has presented a CO detector to just over 2,600 piston-engined aircraft operators in New Zealand.

“We want to raise awareness of the dangers of carbon monoxide emissions in light aircraft with piston engines,” says Director of Civil Aviation, John Jones.

“The September/October issue of the CAA’s safety magazine Vector contains information about carbon monoxide and its dangers, as well as lessons learnt from an accident that should never have happened,” says John Jones.

“Carbon monoxide is tasteless and odourless, which adds to the danger it poses to pilots. Given the very insidious nature of the symptoms of CO poisoning, it is easy to miss the telltale signs until it is too late to react effectively – and once carbon monoxide gets into the bloodstream, it takes considerable time for the body to replace it with oxygen.”

Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include the degradation of vision, increasing loss of concentration, and the impairment of cognitive and motor skills.

In June 2003, the owner of a small home-built aircraft was killed after his aircraft spun into the ground from a low level. The post mortem revealed that the pilot had a blood carbon monoxide level of 23%. At this level of saturation, impairment of the pilot’s cognitive and motor skills was likely. The aircraft was on the first flight following modification to the cabin heating and exhaust system.

“The root cause of this fatal crash was the modification to the exhaust system, but it may have been prevented had the aircraft been fitted with a carbon monoxide detector” says John Jones.

The carbon monoxide detectors the CAA has mailed out to operators are panel mounted ‘spot’ detectors. About the size of a credit card, these units have an exposed spot of a chemical that changes colour in the presence of CO. The units are commercially available from a number of sources within New Zealand for a cost of $10 to $20, and have a limited life of not more than 90 days.

“Increasing numbers of general aviation aircraft are being fitted with detectors, which is good to see,” says John Jones. “For those operators who have not yet had one fitted, I hope that the use of the CAA’s complimentary detector will act as the impetus to them to keep a serviceable detector fitted to their aircraft. Given their low cost, this is a fairly cheap form of insurance.”

Ends

The fatal accident report for ZK-CSR is available on the CAA website (www.caa.govt.nz).

Copies of the Vector articles on Carbon monoxide and the ZK-CSR accident are also available on the CAA website.