

Germanwings Flight 9525 And The Reason Why Single-Pilot Flights Are Not Feasible:

The airline industry and aircraft manufacturer Airbus are pushing for single-pilot flight operations to reduce crew costs, sacrificing safety. Single-pilot operations would be a cost-cutting measure. Aircraft operated by one pilot with advanced technologies could save airlines money, allowing reinvestment and possibly lower ticket fares. But this is a disturbing and life-threatening idea. The risks outweigh any potential benefits.

On March 24, 2015, Germanwings flight 9525 crashed into the Alps in France, killing all 150 people on board. A single pilot with mental health issues was operating the aircraft behind a locked flight deck door. Andreas Lubitz, first officer of the Airbus A320, crashed the aircraft to commit suicide. He had a history of depression and had suspended flight training in 2008. Reports suggest he had suicidal tendencies and was taking medication for vision problems and insomnia. He should never have been allowed in the cockpit, much less left alone.

Fast-forward 10 years, and Airbus is pushing single-pilot operations. Although technology has advanced since the Germanwings crash, a similar and more recent incident made headlines. On February 17, 2024, a Lufthansa Airbus A321 en route to Seville was left without a pilot for 10 minutes after the first officer was incapacitated about a minute after the captain left the flight deck. During the seizure, the first officer was hitting buttons and pushing the rudder pedal. Autopilot corrected the inputs. The captain tried to enter by code 5 times but failed. Fortunately, the first officer regained consciousness, let the captain in, and the aircraft diverted to Madrid. This confirms that single-pilot flights are not safe.

Regulators agree. EASA has concluded that single-pilot flights are not safe to proceed, as there is no proof they can match the safety of operations with two pilots.

How can we ensure Germanwings 9525 won't repeat? How can we ensure that every airliner can auto-land if a pilot is incapacitated? AI cannot yet sense incapacitation or communicate simultaneously with passengers, crew, and air traffic control. Aviation is not ready for such automation.

A sole pilot relying heavily on technology would likely discourage passengers as public trust in AI remains low, reducing demand and affecting profits. Increased workload would stress the pilot, affecting focus and increasing risk. In a world without widespread driverless vehicles, single-pilot flights are not viable.

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