

October 2008

## ***SPECIAL SAFETY REPORT***

### **Cell Phones & Electronic Media Devices - Growing Hazard for Airport Operations**

*By Randy Bisgard, Senior Vice President*

A couple of weeks ago, a tragic accident occurred when a California commuter train ran a red light and slammed into a freight train killing 25 people. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) officials are now investigating reports that the conductor of the train was sending a text message on his mobile phone at the time of the collision. If you haven't already, this accident should start you thinking of the operations and policies at your facility.



*The engineer who caused the crash might have been sending a text message*

With the proliferation of personal communication equipment, cell phones, Ipods and other music players, hand-held games, and other devices, several industries, including aviation, have seen increases in problems associated with the use of this equipment. Clearly, the safety and security of employees, customers, and airport users is threatened by the use of these devices. The issues and concerns may seem obvious, but the variables of how to address them and the application of policies and procedures to deal with them can be more complex.

While two-way radio communications systems have been used on airports for years, the combination of the new generation of communication technology and the culture of the personnel that use them has changed significantly. In today's world, nearly everyone has

#### **For More Information:**

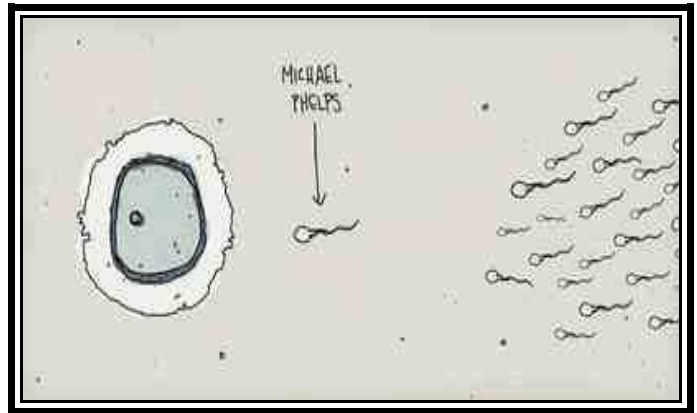
**Michael A. Hodges, MAI**  
President/CEO  
*Airport Business Solutions*  
13529 Prestige Place, Suite 108  
Tampa, Florida 33635-9772  
Phone (813) 269-2525  
Fax (813) 269-8022

[www.airportbusiness.net](http://www.airportbusiness.net)

their own cell phone, not to mention an Ipad or other portable music or game player. In some cases, mostly for safety reasons, even small children are being given cell phones because of their parents desire to be able to instantly connect with their kids. This new culture has exploded into a need to be constantly connected to others via calls, text messaging, or other alerts. While this can be good in many situations, there are many workplace operations, particularly in active aviation environments, where these devices can be very hazardous or even deadly. Your typical two-way radio operation is as simple as pushing down a button and speaking into a microphone. While somewhat distracting, these radio communications can be accomplished fairly safely during most operations because you can keep your head up and focus on the task at hand. Today's technology, particularly cell phones with digital screens and miniature keyboards, require a user to look down at the unit, and sometimes use both hands. This is the primary reason that they are inherently more hazardous, because of the combination of head down distractions and loss of hand control on the task being performed at the time. (This should not imply that hands-free phones should be allowed, because the distraction factor continues to be a serious issue since phone conversations are typically more intensive than radio calls.)

Currently, there are a number of states that have already enacted (or are considering) legislation to limit or restrict the use of cell phones while driving on public streets and highways. While most states allow "hands-free" phones, California, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Washington have banned "hand-held" phones. In addition, text messaging is prohibited while driving in Alaska, Minnesota, New Jersey and Washington. Seventeen states have put restrictions on novice drivers, and fifteen states have banned the use of phones by school bus drivers. This growing trend causing many industry and governmental groups to start to track accidents and injuries related to the use of electronic devices while at work or on the road.

Overall, good communication can provide valued benefits to all types of airport operations or service functions on the field, both from a customer service and efficiency perspective. Recognizing the fact that there are certain supervisory situations or logistical reasons for allowing company-issued cell phone use around the airport, there are several things that should



### ***Michael Phelps - In the Beginning***

be considered to reduce risks at your airport. Some "best practices" must be considered to maintain a safe working environment.

- The use of personnel cell phones during work hours should be prohibited. Cell phone should not be allowed to be carried on a person who is entering airport work areas such as aircraft ramps and parking areas, fuel storage areas, cargo areas, warehouses, hangars, and other hazardous materials areas. Phones are not only a distraction hazard, they can be dropped or fall into fuel tanks, aircraft component areas, engines, or other areas that could cause damage, FOD, or explosion issues.
- All other types of personal communication or entertainment equipment such as radios, Ipods, walkmans, CD/DVD players, games, and other equipment should never be allowed at work.
- "Company issued" cell phones required for proprietary on-airport use must be certified as intrinsically safe and approved under the Class 1, Division 1 requirements and the National Fire Protection Association.
- Cell phone use should never be allowed while operating any GSE equipment or performing any airfield-related job task.
- All approved company cell phone use must be kept at least fifty (50) feet from any vehicle or aircraft refueling operation, parked refueling vehicles, fuel storage areas, aviator's breathing oxygen storage, and any other hazardous material storage areas.

- Personnel in customer service areas, or those dealing with the public should also not be allowed to use personal cell phones at their work station.
- When operating a vehicle, personnel with company issued cell phones should be required to pull over and stop to conduct the a call. Check the latest rules and regulations for vehicle operation and use of electronic devices in your state.
- Placing a call when within the AOA should be severely restricted. Incoming calls should be allowed to go to voice message mode when operating around aircraft or anywhere on the AOA. Calls can be returned when once ground activities are completed.
- If operating a vehicle on active runways or taxiways, cell phone use should be prohibited and only radio communication with the control tower or FAA approved source should be allowed.
- Company cell phone use should never be allowed in precarious positions such as climbing ladders, on walkways, work stands, jetways or other areas that require full attention. Never allow phone usage during aircraft marshaling operations.
- 24 hour operations that require personnel to answer incoming calls at night should also have restrictions on their use. Incoming call should be ignored and voice mail utilized when performing any ramp service functions,



### Jokes of the Month

An airplane pilot dies at the controls. He goes to Hell. The devil takes him to the 'newly arrived' area. There are three doors, marked 1, 2, and 3. The devil tells the pilot that he is going to get to choose his own hell, but first, the devil has to take care of something, and he disappears.

The curious pilot looks behind door number one. He sees a pilot going through flight checks for all eternity. He looks behind door number two, and he sees a pilot that forever finds himself trying to resolve emergency situations. He looks behind the last door, and sees a Captain being waited on hand and foot by scantily-clad stewardesses.

The devil returns just as the pilot gets back to his waiting position. He offers the pilot a choice of door number one or two. The pilot says, "I wanted door number three!" "Sorry," replies the devil, "that's 'flight attendant's hell!'."

\*\*\*\*\*

It was mealtime on a small airline and the flight attendant asked the passenger if he would like dinner.

"What are my choices?" he asked.

"Yes or No," she replied.

particularly aircraft towing, refueling and maintenance operations.

- If a call must be returned, the user must step away from the work at hand and safely complete the call before returning to any job-related function. Particular care should be taken and training procedures followed in these scenarios since the potential for distraction from the work at hand can be disastrous when working on or near aircraft.

There may be many other airport operations or service situations not covered by these basic best practices that may be unique to your situation. We strongly suggest that you review your airport's or company's operations from top to bottom to ensure that each person's work environment is safe regarding communication policies and phone procedures. Be sure to make these practices a part of your written operations manual, training programs and safety management systems. Work with your human resources department or local regulatory agencies to establish methods for control of electronic device usage including penalties consistent with you



other policies. Control can be difficult considering the small size of some of these units which can easily be hidden in clothing or pockets. Watch for earphones connected to wires that may indicate the use of music players, particularly since elevated sound levels could easily drown out any critical natural work sounds that would warn of impending danger. This cannot be emphasized enough, particularly for those individuals working in movement areas.

In today's world of "right now" communications, the expectation has become that you have to talk to everyone that calls as soon as they call, even if it means that you stop what you are doing to take the call. More often, the mistaken expectation is that you can continue to maintain full focus on your job while talking on the phone and handling other tasks. However, when you are working in and around aircraft and related ground equipment, there must be only one task at hand, and that task must have your full and undivided attention.

### ASK ABS

Once again, a valued part of our monthly newsletter is a section called "Ask ABS". Within this section, we answer aviation-related questions from our readership. Each month we publish one question that we receive with a joint reply from our professional consulting team. Please submit any questions via e-mail to Mark Davidson at [mdavidson@airportbusiness.net](mailto:mdavidson@airportbusiness.net).

#### Question:

Does it make any difference whether an FBO calls a fee a "Ramp Fee" or "Facility Fee"?

#### Answer:

Given today's operating environment of high fuel prices and more fuel efficient aircraft, many FBOs have implemented "Facility Fees" (also called service fees or a myriad of other things) to cover operating costs and maintain profitability. The concept is that whether or not the customer buys fuel, they are still using the FBO's facilities: flushing the toilets, enjoying the HVAC, watching the new flat-screen TV, eating the popcorn and cookies, and driving the crew car. Until FBOs find a way to force pilots to buy fuel, they have to look for ways to generate revenue.

The problem in calling it a "ramp fee" is that many FBOs do not own or exclusively lease their ramp. It is just common or preferential use ramp. Unless the FBO has their own exclusive use ramp, they cannot call it a "ramp fee". While it may seem like a semantics argument, sometimes perception is greater than reality. Especially when pilots decide that the FBO's fuel price is too high and they are just being gouged. (Check out the article in the August 2008 issue of *AIRPORT BUSINESS* on FBO trends.)



*Forgot to send in the PFC Application to the FAA?*

*Airport Business Solutions is recognized as the leader in valuation, analysis, and consulting services to airports and aviation businesses, and offers a diversity of backgrounds and experience which provides a new, creative, and "outside the box" perspective on a myriad of aviation issues and problems.*

*Our international affiliate, Airport Business Solutions International, has helped numerous airports worldwide with a variety of airport management and operational issues and problems, including business planning and privatization assessments.*

*ABS Aviation Management Services offers contract airport and FBO management to airports looking to maintain the revenues generated by ownership, while avoiding day-to-day management and operational issues.*

For More Information:  
Michael A. Hodges, MAI  
President/CEO  
*Airport Business Solutions*  
13529 Prestige Place, Suite 108  
Tampa, Florida 33635-9772  
Phone (813) 269-2525  
Fax (813) 269-8022  
Cell (813) 317-3170  
[mhodges@airportbusiness.net](mailto:mhodges@airportbusiness.net)  
[www.airportbusiness.net](http://www.airportbusiness.net)