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Study finds majority of pilots nod off mid-flight – 2nd November 2026

Level 4

A new report has raised concerns about pilot fatigue. A European pilots' association conducted a survey of 7,200 pilots. It found that exhaustion was widespread and underreported. More than three-quarters of respondents said they had dozed off while being in control of an airplane. Almost a quarter of them said they had flown even when they were too tired. Tiredness can result from long working hours, not having enough rest, and changing schedules.

The pilots were honest in their answers. Many said they didn't report fatigue because they were worried about being punished. A pilots' spokesperson said: "When pilots fear career consequences, fatigue goes unreported and the risk returns to the cockpit." Safety experts say fatigue can slow judgement and reaction times. The experts said pilots should be able to report fatigue without worrying. Airlines should prioritise passenger safety.

Level 5

A new report has raised concerns about pilot fatigue. The European Cockpit Association (ECA) conducted a survey of 7,200 pilots. It found that pilot exhaustion is both widespread and underreported. More than three-quarters of respondents said they had briefly dozed off while flying an aircraft. Almost a quarter of them admitted to flying even when they were too tired. Furthermore, half said they had flown when they should have declared themselves unfit for duty. Tiredness can result from long working hours, not enough rest, and unpredictable schedules.

The pilots were very honest in their survey answers. Many said they were reluctant to report fatigue because they feared punishment from their bosses. A director of the ECA warned: "When pilots fear career consequences, fatigue goes unreported and the risk returns to the cockpit." Safety experts say exhaustion can impair judgement, slow reaction times and prevent pilots from responding effectively to unexpected situations. The experts urged airlines to create a culture in which pilots can report tiredness without worries. Airlines should make passenger safety their top priority.

Level 6

A new report has raised serious concerns about pilot fatigue. The European Cockpit Association (ECA) conducted a survey of nearly 7,200 pilots across 32 countries. It discovered that exhaustion in the cockpit is a widespread and underreported problem. More than three-quarters of respondents said they had briefly dozed off while operating an aircraft in the month before the survey. Almost a quarter of them admitted they continued flying even when they were too tired. Furthermore, half said they had operated a flight when they should have declared themselves unfit for duty. Tiredness can result from long working hours, insufficient rest, and unpredictable schedules.

The pilots were very frank in their answers to the survey questions. Many said they were reluctant to report fatigue because they feared punishment or other negative reactions from their bosses. Captain Coen George, a director of the ECA, warned: "When pilots fear career consequences, fatigue goes unreported and the risk returns to the cockpit." Aviation safety experts say exhaustion can impair judgement, slow reaction times and prevent pilots from responding effectively to unexpected in-flight situations. The experts urged airlines to foster a culture in which pilots can report tiredness without fear of repercussions. Carriers should ensure that passenger safety is their top priority.

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