Whether it’s pilot training, aircraft type approval, operational certification, or the fundamental “rules of the air,” aviation is held to myriad standards.

It’s surprising, then, that FAR Part 91, the primary section of the U.S. aviation regulations concerning noncommercial passenger-carrying operations, does not provide an overall operational performance standard, regardless of type of aircraft involved. NBAA Chairman Don Baldwin, the former aviation director for Coca-Cola and Texaco, observed, “On the commercial side, activity is heavily regulated and the FARs are very consistent. There’s already a set of standards there, like flight and duty time requirements.” But, he continued, no such standards exist on the noncommercial side, and yet, “When you get into operating a high-performance aircraft like the equipment we’re using now in business aviation, Part 91 doesn’t cut it anymore. There has to be a higher level.”

In many parts of the world, this deficiency has been addressed by mandating some form of operational approval for private operators similar to a commercial operating certificate typically issued by a government aviation ministry. For instance, Canada has required a Private Operator Certificate (POC) since the early 1990s. Originally administered directly by Transport Canada, the responsibility for the POC program — which applied to every private operator of a pressurized turbine-powered aircraft used to carry passengers, whether for business or pleasure — was delegated to the Canadian Business Aviation Association (CBAA) two years ago under a groundbreaking government/private sector partnership that is being watched closely by many countries’ civil aviation authorities, including the FAA. In the European Union, the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) is also cautiously eyeing private operator certification as a possible solution to its ongoing self-generated conundrum of how to classify and regulate business aviation within the codification of its JAR OPS 2 rules for non-commercial operations.

Desperately Seeking Standards

It seems the idea of a universal safety-management standard that would accommodate business aviation has been on the table at the NBAA and the International Business Aviation Council (IBAC) for several years as the specter of commercial regulation hovered over business aviation like an ominous cloud.

Safety audits by recognized firms such as Wyvern and ARG/US, as well as the Flight Safety Foundation, have long served as the backbone of industry self-regulation. Many charter customers refuse to put their employees or family members aboard an aircraft whose operator had not been audited and listed by a recognized third party beforehand. But each such evaluation is independent and does not conform to any universal standard.

These concerns led IBAC in 1999 (heavily encouraged by the NBAA and the reorganization of Canada’s POC program) to begin formulation of a set of operational safety standards for business aviation. Another influence behind the decision was the growing worldwide acceptance of the Geneva-based International Standards Organization and its ISO 9000 code of industry best practices, claimed to enhance efficiency, productivity and employee well-being, and facilitate business internationally. Many North American and European corporations were ISO 9000-registered, meaning that they had completed a rigorous program of audits and revisions to conform their activities to a comprehensive and internationally respected code of practice. Because ISO 9000 certification lends a certain cachet to an organization, many CEOs of ISO-registered corporations began to ask their aviation managers why a similar standard didn’t exist for business aviation. Some even went so far as to ISO 9000-certify their flight departments.

Even though ISO 9000 lacked specificity
addressing the arcane nature of flight operations, it did present a template and tools upon which to base a set of business aviation standards, and therefore was a good place to begin. Over the next 18 months, the IBAC team defined 12 unique areas for application of standards that could be integrated on the ISO 9000 armature. They were:

- Safety Management Systems,
- Organization and Personnel Requirements,
- Training and Proficiency,
- Flight Operations,
- Operations in International Airspace,
- Aircraft Equipment Requirements,
- Aircraft Maintenance Requirements,
- Company Operations Manual,
- Emergency Response Plan,
- Environmental Management,
- Transportation of Dangerous Goods (i.e., hazmat) and
- Security.

Best practices for addressing these areas were accumulated from a variety of sources, including hundreds of corporate pilots from the United States, Canada, Europe and South America.

**A Standard Is Born**

Out of this process emerged the International Standard for Business Aircraft Operations (IS-BAO), a “professional safety code of practice for flight departments worldwide, developed by the industry for the industry.” The program was further developed through two more phases, the latter focused on field-testing and fine-tuning, and ran in parallel with the CBAAs POC qualification. IBAC’s IS-BAO project manager, former Transport Canada Aviation Director Ray Rohr, even consulted the CBAAs on the POC program and developed a liaison between it and IS-BAO for sharing information and maintaining compatibility.

Testing was done through mock applications and follow-up audits in actual flight departments. And the program was formally introduced at EBACE 2002 in Geneva. “There were a number of flight departments that stepped up and bought it right away,” Don Spruston, IBAC director general, recalled. “Three companies that got certificates of registration [the proof that an operator has implemented the standard] right away were Entergy of New Orleans, Weldwood Canada of Vancouver and Coca-Cola in Atlanta.”

Since Weldwood Canada’s flight operation, headed up by pilot Scott Macpherson, was facing the eventual Canadian POC audit anyway, it wanted to be in the lead in both. “We wanted to be involved in both processes, as each would inform the other,” Macpherson told B/CA from a layover in Calgary. “We also wanted a practical, sustainable standard, not for the standards maker but for the sake of the operator. Ours is the classic small flight department with one airplane [a Citation Excel] and about five people. For that reason, IBAC wanted us to do the IS-BAO audit cold turkey as a trial to determine how simple or difficult it was for a flight department of our size to implement IS-BAO, or otherwise, how close a typical operation might be to the standard.”

Ultimately, Weldwood was first to achieve both POC and IS-BAO certification. “The earlier trial we did [with IS-BAO] helped us determine what was and wasn’t workable,” Macpherson said. “We were first to do it in Canada with the POC and worldwide for the IS-BAO, so we have two certificates on our office wall at the hangar franked with the number one.”

This is not to assume that IS-BAO is limited to international operations, Bill Stine emphasized. Stine happens to be international operations director at the NBAA, but wants to make it clear that IS-BAO is intended for domestic as well as cross-border operations — “it’s an internationally developed industry standard for the operation of business aircraft anywhere,” he emphasized — and that it applies to flight departments and operations in international airspace, emergency response plans, environmental management, transportation of dangerous goods (i.e., hazmat) and security.

**IS-BAO Benefits**

During the definition phase of IS-BAO development, IBAC’s task force identified 15 benefits that could be achieved from adoption of a standard industry code of practice.

**For Flight Departments:**

- **Self-education** — IS-BAO helps flight departments learn from experiences of their peers.
- **Assistance to new operators** — New flight departments can adopt a code of best practice from the beginning of operations.
- **Assisting with rapid growth** — Growing flight departments can introduce professional standards to facilitate and safely manage change.
- **Reduced potential for repeat errors** — Professional standards help avoid mistakes.
- **Heightened board confidence** — International standardization provides global benefits. Company executives understand the concept of industry standards to facilitate international commerce. Recognized global standards give the non-aviation executives and board members a means of measuring the quality of flight operations.
- **Assurance to employees** — Employees flying on company aircraft will benefit from knowing that the flight department meets professional safety standards.
- **Pride in achievement** — Company executives, flight department managers and staff can feel the pride of achievement.

**For the Business Aviation Community:**

- **Raises the safety bar** — Standardization fosters safety by encouraging professional operations.
- **Raises confidence of regulators** — Regulators are given confidence that the business aviation industry is capable of self-governance to a high safety level.
- **Assistance to regulators** — Enables deployment of scarce safety resources to high-risk areas.
- **An alternative to historical regulatory programs** — Provides society with an alternative to traditional regulatory oversight through application of industry self-monitoring.
- **Enhances communication among operators** — A team approach to keeping the standards current benefits the industry as companies learn from each other’s experiences with new equipment and procedures.
- **Institutionalizes best practices** — Provides a systematic means of capturing best practices and making them available to the industry as a whole.
- **Fosters public recognition of a well-managed industry** — A self-administered global standard fosters public confidence.
- **Promotes global harmonization** — Business aviation assumes a responsible and proactive role in promoting global harmonization of operating procedures and requirements.
charter businesses of all sizes. He added that some members now require any charter operation they use to be an IS-BAO participant.

Complementary Standards
The integrating of workable best practices into universal standards implicit in the ISO concept has led to some valuable byproducts, such as cross-certification.

Consequently, guidance material contained in the IS-BAO international procedures section enables international operators to prepare procedures manuals for obtaining Reduced Vertical Separation Minimums (RVSM) certification and Minimum Navigation Performance Specification (MNPS) approval. Likewise, the security section contains information on how U.S. operators can obtain an NBAA Transportation Security Administration Access Certificate (TSAAC) and how European operators can satisfy anticipated JAR OPS 2 security requirements. (The generic operations manual template included with IS-BAO materials is available in North American and JAR OPS formats.)

Furthermore, the NBAA has “inculcated” IS-BAO principles into its Flight Operations Manual Workshop, and attendees using its template for revising their manual will produce an IS-BAO-compliant document that will satisfy the IS-BAO audit. The security section will also be TSAAC-compliant.

During the definition phase of IS-BAO development, Spruston said, a number of principles were established, including that the IBAC standard must also satisfy the ICAO standard for general aviation — in other words, there had to be compatibility. “Another was that it had to be performance-based; that is, not prescriptive,” Spruston said. “What that means is that the standard should not tell people how to do it — it should tell them what the outcome should be. That way, flight departments can tailor their manuals in accordance with how they operate and develop processes to show how they would adhere to the standard.”

Spruston again cited flight and duty time requirements, which IS-BAO addresses under the broader category of fatigue management. “Most of the government regs on duty time are prescriptive,” Spruston said. “In IS-BAO there is a quarter of a page that says there must be a fatigue-management or fatigue-countermeasures program. It does not say how you must do it, just that you must demonstrate that you have a program. We have guidance material at the back of the standard that is called an ‘acceptable means of compliance,’ so if you don’t want to develop your own program, you can use one that has been developed. The one we use is from the Flight Safety Foundation. But it is quite acceptable for a flight department to develop its own program.”

Systemized Risk Management
While most IS-BAO standards are constructed in a commonsense approach and will probably not seem foreign to a well-managed flight department, Rohr said, “the one element that may be different is the safety-management system. A safety-management system is the evolutionary development of the traditional flight safety program with quality-management principles added. In quality management, you do things proactively.”

In a “traditional” safety program, data are used to make decisions and implement programs and procedures, Rohr said. “In the safety management system, we do the same approach. “After consulting our pre-auditor, I scrapped that idea and started to compose an entirely new ops manual from scratch. And that was the right way to accommodate the comprehensiveness of the IS-BAO template, which I can tell you, covers everything involved with running a safe business aviation operation. The auditor suggested I approach it from the point of view of an entirely new employee having to learn how an operation is structured and how it works. That [writing the manual] took up most of the seven and a half months.’”

One Operator’s Tale
It was a “midlife crisis” that spurred safety-minded Richard Longlott, aviation manager and chief pilot at Harrisburg, Pa.-based Mi Windows and Doors, Inc., to enroll in the IS-BAO program. “I was wondering if my operation was safe enough, whether we were doing all we could to make it as safe as possible,” he told B/CA from his office at Middletown-Harrisburg International Airport (MDT) where Mi bases its single Cessna Citation III.

“I’m also on the NBAA Safety Committee, and in that capacity, I learned that none of us walk on water,” Longlott continued. “That realization really got me to thinking, and after a safety discussion with our risk manager at the company, I decided to put the flight department through an outside audit. Researching my options in that regard, I learned that while there were a lot of different audits and auditing procedures available, none of them seemed to fit our operation exactly. And customizing one of these audits would have been too expensive for our purposes.

“Then in summer 2002,” Longlott continued, “Ray Rohr from IBAC did a presentation to the NBAA Safety Committee on IS-BAO, and I felt I’d found my ‘perfect solution.’ I liked the format — it seemed to cover everything — and right after Ray spoke, I stepped up and bought the package. I felt we needed to be doing more within the department to ensure we were running as safe an operation as possible.”

Longlott started with a “pre-audit” to use as a base point. “From there we would then determine what we needed to do for certification. The auditor looked through our ops manual and our paper work and even flew a trip with us in the jump-seat to observe our procedures. Afterward we compared the results of the pre-audit with the IS-BAO checklist, and that told us where we needed to go.”

One area where Mi needed to tighten up was its maintenance communications paperwork trail. “We were legal under the FARs,” Longlott said, “but according to the IS-BAO format, we needed to formalize and document some of our maintenance requests and actions, since IS-BAO wants to see a trail that can be followed with nothing left to chance. Working this out, we learned that Cessna, through its CessCom maintenance support program, had appropriate forms available for the purpose that we could use. Our maintenance director, Jamey Guise, then developed a system that utilized these forms and matched the IS-BAO format. On the other hand, operationally, we were OK.”

Originally, Longlott tried to adapt Mi’s existing operations manual to the IS-BAO template but ran into difficulty with that approach. “After consulting our pre-auditor, I scrapped that idea and started to compose an entirely new ops manual from scratch. And that was the right way to accommodate the comprehensiveness of the IS-BAO template, which I can tell you, covers everything involved with running a safe business aviation operation. The auditor suggested I approach it from the point of view of an entirely new employee having to learn how an operation is structured and how it works. That [writing the manual] took up most of the seven and a half months.”

From October 2004 Business & Commercial Aviation ©2004, The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. All rights reserved.
thing but add processes and procedures to proactively identify hazards and the associated risks, develop mitigation, and then track whether our actions are appropriate and effective. So there is accountability and involvement of everyone in the operation, including the passengers.”

The passengers, too? Yep, said Rohr, “so that they have an understanding of the issues affecting safety, like flight and duty time.” Using just this example, the point would be for the passengers to have a flexible understanding of crew fatigue measures, so when they’re told, “We can’t meet that schedule because it exceeds our company duty time requirements,” there is acceptance because the company’s safety policy is chiseled in stone. Involving the people you fly in the safety-management process and encouraging their ongoing input also makes them advocates for adherence to a higher standard, as their own welfare is ultimately at stake in running a safe operation. In explaining this, emphasis on ISO principles — which most laypeople involved in large-scale business understand and accept — is recommended.

Weldwood’s Macpherson provided a practical example of how straightforward safety management reasoning can be: “Concerning hazards tracking, for example, one of our HITTS [hazard identification tracking system] cards is still open. Here’s why: A runway at one of the locations we regularly fly to has been sealed with a substance that makes it very slippery in the rain. Since there’s nothing we can do about that — other than pay a whole lot of money for the runway to be resurfaced — our solution to that problem is that we simply don’t fly there if rain is forecast! That’s the SOP we used to address that situation and ‘track’ the hazard.”

Universal Model

So in its simplest form, IS-BAO is a uniform operational template that addresses risk-management and problem-solving based on proven procedures in a universally understood manner. “It gives you a measure,” the NBAA’s Stine said, “and that may help to control insurance rates, as that industry has shown some interest in IS-BAO, too. What it’s about is controlling your risks; the process ain’t glamorous but in the end, it’s best practices applied to your operation.”

Baldwin added that IS-BAO “validates to both corporate management and the risk-management department the fact that the

Presentation of certificate of registration to Coca-Cola Co.

Giving the Citation the Ax

In addition to program costs, two things turned up in the IS-BAO audit that wound up costing Mi some money. “Because it’s an international standard,” Longlott said, “we didn’t have TCAS II, and we’re now in the process of installing it, and we didn’t have a crash ax in the airplane [not required by the FAA]. The former is costing us almost $100,000 — we’re also doing a TAWS installation along with it — and we were planning to do it anyway. On the other hand, the crash ax cost us about a hundred bucks.”

Because the Citation III was coming up on a Phase V inspection, IBAC allowed Mi to delay the TCAS installation a few months after the company was awarded its IS-BAO certification to conform with the impending inspection under the proviso that the operator would document the installation with IBAC when it occurred. “Accordingly, our chairman sent them a letter indicating that the equipment was being installed this summer,” Longlott said. “We met all the requirements except that one, and they gave us several months to comply; we will actually beat that deadline by a month.”

Longlott — whose airplane wound up being temporarily shoehorned off the field (the former Olmstead AFB) after 9/11 for fear that it and others based there were a threat to the nearby Three Mile Island nuclear plant — was especially impressed with IS-BAO’s hazmat and security standards sets. “Those are really good provisions. Concerning security, I consulted the regional office of the TSA here in Harrisburg, told them what we were trying to do, and asked for their advice. They were not only glad to work with us, they sent their chief over to do an inspection and give us security advice. They really got behind our effort — the chief was impressed that we were going for a higher standard — and were phenomenally helpful.

“I also brought in the fire department to check our hangar for possible hazards, and that led to a new relationship where they’ll be including us in their airport training sessions,” Longlott continued. “As far as the hazmat requirement, I asked a colleague on the NBAA Safety Committee for advice and also checked in with the safety director of Mi Window and Door who referred me to some DOT contacts that were useful. As a procedure, when we post our flight schedule now on the company e-mail, I also add some advice on what not to bring on board — like eight-foot window frames! The idea is to remind people that we can’t take everything on the airplane.”

Mi Windows and Doors started the IS-BAO procedure with the pre-audit in November-December 2002 and underwent the certification audit in July 2003. “We had no difficulty passing the certification audit at that point, and we received the IS-BAO certificate the same month. In the 54 years of our company, we were the first department to undergo an outside audit.” (Mi has deep aviation roots; its founder, James Walker, was a B-29 test pilot during World War II.)

“If you do this right, it’s a lot of work, but in the end it will accur-ately reflect your operation,” Longlott claimed. “If any component of our operations manual didn’t pass the IS-BAO litmus test, we rewrote it. If it didn’t reflect what we were actually doing, we developed a system to reflect the actual activity. The way I put it in the manual was, ‘Doing the right things at the right time for the right reasons.’ Beside the sense of accomplishment — it’s a lot of work — it qualified what we thought we knew all along, as well as validating that all our work on safety management paid off, attending safety conferences, my work on the Safety Committee, all the previous audits. Ray’s presentation that day in 2002 really sold me.”

Longlott is so sold on the merits of IS-BAO that he believes the process is the “ultimate test” of a flight operation’s safety. “Having an outside audit of that magnitude is essential to running a safe operation. You need to do something, so why not pick a program with the toughest standards to adhere to? We can now hold ourselves up against the largest flight departments in the country and know with confidence that we’re running a safe, quality flight operation.”
How IS-BAO Works

While IS-BAO is managed and administered by IBAC, the program materials are sold through the Council’s signatory members, such as the NBAA in the United States or the European Business Aviation Association (EBAA) in Europe. Cost is $950 for program documents and the generic operations manual template; also included is a CD containing all the materials in digital form that allows customization of the template to fit the scope of the operation.

The process of conforming the operation to the IS-BAO standard is largely self-guided, with the key being the operations manual template. “It does take some work,” the NBAA’s Bill Stine said. “You don’t just fill in the blanks.” Whether starting from scratch or revising an existing manual, be prepared for considerable self-examination, the necessity of enlisting the cooperation and input of everyone involved in the flight operation (including your passengers), and to do a lot of writing.

Richard Longlott, chief pilot at Mi Windows and Doors, Inc. in Harrisburg, Pa., who guided his single Citation III flight department through IS-BAO in 2002, said he’d never done so much writing in his life when he tackled the project of completely redoing his ops manual. “It took seven and a half months to write the new one, mostly while we were on the road, as we fly a lot. I literally wore out a keyboard on my laptop doing all that writing! It was a real team-building exercise for all of us, and it made us more cohesive and closer as a group. But it can be a humbling experience. . . .”

Once the standards set has been applied to the operation and the ops manual composed or realigned with IS-BAO principles, the program is considered to be implemented. At this point, it is incumbent on the operator to retain an IS-BAO-accredited auditor and undergo the certification audit, an additional self-borne cost.

If the auditor finds the operation to be within IS-BAO compliance, then he or she files a report with IBAC recommending certification. “We review the report and contact the auditor if we have any further questions,” Spruston said. “If it’s acceptable, we award the certificate, which is good for two years, after which another audit must be performed.” With award of the certificate, the operation is then registered with IBAC as IS-BAO-compliant. Some operators have hired auditors in a consulting capacity to assist them in conforming their operations to IS-BAO and preparing them for the audit, but Stine warned that, in this case, another approved auditor must be retained to perform the certification audit in order to preserve objectivity. In addition, IBAC’s Ray Rohr pointed out, his organization conducts full-day IS-BAO training workshops in conjunction with NBAA regional forums in the United States in which all the standards sets and implementation issues are discussed. Additional standalone sessions will be scheduled for later this year, with postings on the IBAC Web site.

company flight department meets a higher standard. One of the areas I found interesting in the IS-BAO materials was questions about the culture of how specific policies become adopted within a given operation. IS-BAO addresses a lot of those questions by replacing the spontaneous reaction with a standardized approach to problem solving. ‘Here’s why we’re doing what we’re doing.’ It also brings a high level of credibility to a flight operation.

The subject of credibility comes up a lot when discussing payoffs for going through the IS-BAO process. Here’s what forest-products manufacturer Weldwood’s Macpherson said about how his fellow employees now regard his operation following both Canadian POC certification and IS-BAO registration: “Our corporation has certified every mill it uses to ISO 9000, and all our forest lands have been certified to ISO 14000, the ISO environmental standard. In addition, Weldwood is also certified to other forestry standards, both provincial and international, that are forestry-specific, so [management] understood the idea of holding the flight operation to a higher standard. The major benefit — and they understood this intuitively — is that we are identifying our risks ahead of time before they can become issues. So there was a very big splash when we got the certification.”

IS-BAO registration has the potential to positively change the culture in a flight department from reactive to proactive, which is especially valuable from the manager’s standpoint, Macpherson maintained. “It’s a tool for cultural change.”

Level of Acceptance

If the benefits of IS-BAO registration are so apparent, why are Weldwood, Coke and Entergy among only 26 flight departments registered so far? Why aren’t more operators scheduling IS-BAO audits and following through with registration?

IBAC’s Spruston said registrations are “not unlike what we expected,” when the program was devised. In fact, he said sales of the IS-BAO document package — about 300 to date, or some 10 percent of the NBAA’s operator members — “exceeded our expectations” and that a number of operators are proceeding with it.” IBAC knows this from feedback it receives from auditors it has designated to perform the IS-BAO registration inspections.

“First, you have to understand that IS-BAO is a completely voluntary program,” Spruston continued. “We had no expectations right at the beginning that there would be a rush to do it. The benefits right now are primarily to demonstrate to your passengers and board that you’ve met an internationally recognized operational and safety standard.”

Spruston admitted that “a lot of companies have bought into the IS-BAO program and haven’t applied for registration, but the benefit is having the safety standard, not necessarily proving to the world that you’ve done it.”

There also has been an assumption that eventually the aviation insurance industry will offer lower rates to operators who pursue registration, “but it’s too early to verify whether anyone’s getting a break,” Spruston said. “We have talked to insurance executives, but no one has said they would lower rates. However, we think that’s coming.”

As for the plodding rate of registrations, Stine said, “Look, it takes a lot of work to do this thing, as it’s a detailed validation of your safety management. You don’t just fill in the blanks on a form and call in the auditors. It takes time and the commitment to see it through, and this is especially challenging for small operations with limited personnel.”

Again and again, B/C/A heard this story when polling operators who’d taken on the IS-BAO program (see “One Operator’s Tale” sidebar): Rewriting the operations manual in IS-BAO format and plugging holes in your operation to meet the program’s standards is a lot of work — and occasionally humbling. “It takes at least eight months to a year to do it all,” Spruston pointed out. On the other hand, operators who’ve attended the NBAA’s operations manual workshop will have a leg up.

“I attended the NBAA’s two-day operations manual workshop after last year’s convention, and we signed up immediately for the materials,” Martin Rollinger, Caterpillar’s aviation manager in Peoria, Ill., told B/C/A in an informal poll of flight departments concerning IS-BAO. Contacting
Rollinger in a cold call, B/CA learned of Caterpillar’s involvement in the standards program. “We have made the commitment to pursue it through to registration, and have scheduled our audit for December 2004,” Rollinger stated, proudly.

“After we purchased the document package, I put one of my captains, Keith Unzicker, in charge of implementing it,” Rollinger continued. “We found that we were already 90 to 95 percent there in terms of the IS-BAO requirements and needed only to put it in [the IS-BAO] format and then address the remaining 5 to 10 percent.”

Caterpillar is “doing” IS-BAO, Rollinger said, because “it appears to be the right thing. We are already an ISO 9000-registered flight department; however, ISO is a more general program, and IS-BAO is specific to aviation. Even though we have always strived for excellence in running our flight operation and providing the best service we can to our passengers, we thought this would help us polish our operation and be even better. Because of the comprehensiveness of the program, my advice to anyone contemplating going through it is to hang in there and see it through to registration. I’m thankful I’ve got an enthusiastic guy in my operation like Keith to manage it for us.”

Desperately Seeking an Honest Audit

On the other hand, the chief pilot of a very large flight department for one of America’s largest corporations likes the idea of comparing his already top-notch operation to a recognized standard but isn’t sure he’ll go through the time and expense of an IS-BAO audit.

“We’ve bought the materials and are currently developing our operations manual according to the IS-BAO format,” the pilot told B/CA. “We’ve found that we already adhere to a lot of its principles and, in fact, exceed its levels of detail and accountability. IS-BAO ultimately is a good idea, however, we haven’t decided yet whether we’ll go to the expense of doing the audit. We’re a very large, very professional operation that also includes a charter side, so we operate to very high standards anyway — equal to or better than any airline.”

The chief pilot plainly doesn’t like commercial audits. “I’ve seen too many auditors who come into your operation and tell you what you want to hear,” he complained. “You can put anything you want on paper, but that doesn’t tell you anything about how an operation is really run. In order to do that, you have to observe the day-to-day activities over a long period of time and actually fly with the crews. These guys [the auditors] come for two days and say they know your operation. That doesn’t mean we won’t do it [go for IS-BAO registration], but my past experience makes me kind of skeptical. We have to get the paperwork done first. The value of IS-BAO is that it’s a standard for business aviation across the world, and I’m guessing the insurance companies may see some value in it, as well.”

It seems that the parent company having qualified for ISO 9000 registration often informs a flight department’s decision to pursue IS-BAO registration. “We haven’t bought it — yet — but we fully intend to, and we’re now preparing the ground work to begin,” the chief pilot of a West Coast-headquartered energy company said. “Here’s why: Our company is in the process of going ISO 9000. Concerning IS-BAO, we like the auditing and safety aspects of it. It’s the future — we’re not the first but everyone sooner or later will have to do it, especially international operators. It keeps you honest and brings in a third party to look at your operation with a critical eye. We believe audits are good, as you can have blemishes in your operation that you’re so used to, you just don’t see them.”

Meanwhile, Spruston points to the fact that IBAC has 40 auditors qualified to conduct IS-BAO inspections, “and I think that alone is an indication that there’s active interest in it out there.”

Government Acceptance

Should IS-BAO achieve wide acceptance, it is likely that it will play a greater role in the trend of industry self-regulation as either a substitute for government regulation or a mandated standard.

The ISO-based standards set could have a particular impact in Europe. “Although we developed this as a code of practice for the benefit of the industry,” Spruston said, “the JAA and EASA are looking at the concept of using industry standards in rulemaking. It’s quite clear that there is an acceptance of the concept of using an industry standard. They’ve told us it’s a good way to go. The implication here is that in Europe, IS-BAO could be beneficial to operators, and indeed, European operators are urging EASA to consider using it as a basis for rulemaking.”

In the short term, the NBAA’s Baldwin predicted, as more operators become IS-BAO-registered, “you’ll see some validation when operating into the European community, for example. The operator can say his operations are IS-BAO-based. The Canadians have done it and the Europeans might, although we don’t know where they’re going with this ultimately. It raises the level of competence and capability when U.S.-based aircraft enter those other arenas.

“As far as the United States is concerned,” Baldwin continued, “I’ve got to believe at some point, because of the growing sophistication of the aircraft and the operations, that there will be discussions about whether there should be consideration given to establishing a higher level of regulatory compliance. IS-BAO could be a basis for this if the United States moves in that direction.”

Further, by heeding to a respected universal operational standard, the industry may assert further self-control, as has occurred in Canada.

CBAA President Rich Gage said his organization’s oversight of the POC “is privatization of a government service,” adding, “I will go on record as saying this is where we are going. The government of at least this country will not have the resources to provide the services that we’re going to need or expect. We saw this five years ago as a means of solving one or two specific problems [the other being ATC], and it has done that. Many of us believe that an almost open-ended set of opportunities exists here for industry in general to take more deliberate control of its affairs from a regulatory perspective.”

The appeal of universal recognition and self-control may prove to be powerful motivators for those considering adopting IS-BAO. IBAC’s Spruston acknowledges that it will take time and encouragement to get the industry to fully adopt the standards program, but he added, “We are ahead of our forecast, and we’re quite happy where we are.” B/CA