

July 27, 2010

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia: Mr. Speaker, H.R. 5810 establishes criminal penalties for knowingly aiming a laser pointer at an aircraft or its flight path.

Incidents involving lasers aimed at aircraft have raised concerns over the potential threat to aviation safety and national security. Some are concerned that terrorists might use high-powered lasers to, among other things, incapacitate pilots. There is also concern that laser devices can distract or temporarily incapacitate pilots during critical phases of a flight.

Lasers pose a safety hazard to flight operations. Even brief exposure to a relatively low-powered laser beam can cause discomfort and temporarily affect the pilot's vision. The visual distractions of a laser can also cause a pilot to become disoriented or lose situational awareness while flying.

High-powered laser devices can incapacitate pilots and inflict eye injuries when viewed at closer ranges. In fact, the National Transportation Safety Board documented two cases in which pilots sustained eye injuries and were incapacitated during critical phases of a flight.

In one of those cases, after a laser was pointed at a pilot's plane, he experienced a burning sensation and tearing in his eyes. A subsequent eye examination revealed multiple flash burns in the pilot's cornea. The FAA researchers have compiled a data base of more than 400 incidences between 1990 and 2005 in which pilots have been startled, distracted, temporarily blinded, or disoriented by laser exposure.

Government officials at FAA, Defense Department, and Department of Homeland Security are exempted from the prohibition of this bill, as are individuals using lasers to send an emergency distress signal.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleagues to support the bill. I thank the gentleman from

California for his leadership in bringing this bill to our attention.