

LASERS

There is gathering interest in the laser problem, which as we always recognized, extends beyond the hazard to aviation.

Newspaper reports are suggesting that action is needed:

The Sunday Times:

http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk_news/National/article1654673.ece?shareToken=b268eb2d6a719346c58cc3d6d2ca9fcc

The Telegraph:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/12091803/Dozens-of-children-suffer-eye-damage-as-a-result-of-lasers.html>

Fahd Quhill, the surgeon mentioned in the reports above, is expected to join the next UK Laser Working Group meeting on 29th January. Public Health England (PHE) and some of the medical hierarchy do not yet see a causal link (other than accepting that lasers will damage eyesight) for the aviation scenario of an aircraft inflight. For example, despite Fahd Quhill having a peer-reviewed article accepted for publication in a reputable aviation medicine journal, PHE does not accept that pilot eye injury could be caused by an external laser.

Work is in hand with police chiefs to have lasers added to the list of offensive weapons, which will affect stop and search powers across the UK; that is not an easy step but it was originally proposed by the police and does appear possible. Ongoing work in Europe (in which Fahd Quhill is engaged) seeks to establish EC limits on laser power and import rules to match, which should limit access to laser devices in the UK. It won't stop purchases overseas but it will at least make it possible to add lasers to the list of prohibitions so that HMRC can confiscate them when found.

A straight ban on laser pointers is unlikely to be achievable for a number of reasons. First, it will be almost impossible to police because of the number of legal (<1mW) devices already in circulation; there will be resistance in Whitehall to creating another crime in a currently legitimate area. Secondly, there will be lots of people who have a perfectly sensible reason for having a pointer (presentations, teaching etc.) and for whom a proper use of a low-power laser is not an issue; it would not be reasonable to make criminals of such people. A ban on high-power lasers is a different question and should be possible, especially if it can be tied to the EC work. There are a few MPs and one member of the Lords interested in the issue, and DfT have agreed to broker a multi-modal cross-Government approach when the UK Laser Working Group has suitable evidence to back up the case.