Cockpit napping – what are the rules?

Mark Zee
11 December, 2019



As is too often forgotten by regulators, aircraft flown by humans require rules that match human needs.

One of those needs is **sleep**. Normally, we do this for about 33% of the day. If you manage to get a perfect night's sleep, have a short ride to the airport, and then operate a long haul flight that departs on schedule, you *might* get away with not feeling tired during it. Most of the time, these perfect conditions don't show up on the day.

Especially with the cumulative fatigue we suffer as pilots, a quick nap works wonders.

NASA did extensive research on this in 1994, and the findings showed that "The benefits of the nap were observed through the critical descent and landing phases of flight … The nap did not affect layover sleep or the cumulative sleep debt displayed by the majority of crew members. The nap procedures were implemented with minimal disruption to usual flight operations and there were no reported or identified concerns regarding safety." This gave us the term, "**the NASA Nap**".

So, napping is good. NASA says so. But, around the world, we have very different regulatory approaches to this. To make it sound better, the regulators call it "Controlled Rest", or CR.

Places where you can:

Australia, Bolivia, Canada, China, Europe, Israel, India, New Zealand, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.
[*source: Flight Safety, 2018*]. Know more? Comment on the article and we'll update.

Places where you definitely can't:

The US. Although the Air Force and the Coast Guard allow it, the FAA does not – neither for Part 91, nor Part 121. CR was considered when the latest FAA rules were developed beginning in 2010, but it was excluded from the final regulations. FAA Advisory Circular 120-100 (FAA, 2010, page 11) states:
Although a number of foreign air carriers authorized in-seat cockpit naps during flight, **the FAA does not authorize such in-seat cockpit naps**.

Just drink coffee!

That seems to be the FAA position. No napping allowed. There are some wonderful resource guides, listed below, that delve deep into the subject, but in terms of napping – it's still forbidden. Why? That's a good question. We don't know.

Beverage	Caffeine Amount
Espresso coffee	78-106 mg/100ml
Brewed coffee	36-112 mg/100ml
Instant coffee	23-73 mg/100ml
Decaffeinated coffee	0-5mg/100ml
Black tea	13-47 mg/100ml
Energy drinks (e.g. V, Red Bull, Monster)	15-42 mg/100ml
Soft drinks (e.g. Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Lift, Mountain Dew)	9-14 mg/100ml
Dark chocolate	43-125mg/100g
White and milk chocolate	21-23 mg/100g

Guidance Docs:

- Fatigue Management for Airline operations (ICAO/IATA/IFALPA)
- Fatigue Management for GA operations (ICAO/IBAC/Flight Safety)
- Controlled Rest Resource Guide (Flight Safety)
- NASA Research Document (1994): Effects of Planned Cockpit Rest on Crew Performance and Alertness in Long-Haul Operations

Discussion

OPS CHAT

We will discuss the topic in the Ops Chat on December 12th, 2019 at 12pm EST – register here: https://ops.group/opschat