DPE System Under Microscope

SAFE: "More Bureaucracy Seldom Leads To Improvement"

The FAA is taking action to improve the DPE testing system. This was obvious with the **removal of geographical boundaries** in the fall of 2018. And now they are convening an **Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Committee** to fast-track a complete review of the DPE system to be complete in a year.

"There is a definite need for improvement in the system," said SAFE Executive Director David St George, "but more bureaucratic oversight and rules seldom leads to bettering any system. A more complicated process might further disincentivize qualified candidates. People don't realize most professional pilots do better flying than examining. Flight testing is a service."

He pointed out that when DPEs were first designated in the 1960s, they were never intended to be full-time "professional evaluators." Originally, DPEs were professional pilots recruited to assist the FAA in testing airman competency for certificates. Today, many DPEs have become "professional evaluators" who may not have flown professionally or taken a checkride themselves in years. Recent changes to combat this trend have recently been added such as the requiring 60 hours of PIC annually for all DPEs. This rule was enacted after it was discovered some DPEs had not flown *any PIC* in over 5 years! On the other hand an airline pilot with no GA experience might not be a good fit as a DPE. Selection is critical to obtain a balance of good skills and appropriate demeanor.

"Today, with the critical pilot shortage and rapidly rising student starts, DPEs perform 99% of the flight testing nationally" said St George, "so proficiency and a high moral standard are critical." SAFE is working with the **Aviators Code Initiative** to finalize a new **DPE Model Code of Conduct** to codify "Best DPE Practices" and help bolster integrity while combating arrogance in the system. "Testing should not be a difficult or adversarial process," he said. "There are certainly too many **bad stories** circulating out there; something needs to be done."