

LASER BEAMS COULD THREATEN AVIATION SAFETY

The ongoing quest to safeguard aircraft and passenger safety saw the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS) limit the use of lasers around the airport. In recent news, the increase in ownership of powerful lasers has roused widespread concern as these versions were reported to be able to cause fire or burn injuries. Known as “burning lasers,” they have an output of more than five milliwatts (mW) and are able to pop balloons, burn paper, ignite matches and even blind people.

Lasers, especially in the vicinity of an airport, are a potential hazard to aircraft operations. They can confuse, distract or cause discomfort to pilots and may cause temporary flash blindness, or in severe cases, eye injury if shone directly into the pilot’s eyes. Because of such dangers, the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) recommends that the use of lasers should be restricted around an airport.

Under the Air Navigation Order of Singapore, pointing a laser or any other form of light whose glare may endanger an aircraft in motion is an offence. Those found guilty may face a maximum fine of S\$20,000. If found guilty a second time or more, a fine of up to S\$40,000 or jail term of up to 15 months or both may be sentenced. Nobody has been arrested or prosecuted for such an offence thus far.

Laser displays within five kilometres of the airport have to be approved by CAAS. In these instances, pilots will be alerted. Work is also underway to introduce lasers into simulator training for pilots, while CAAS has been actively engaging public users of such lasers to raise awareness of the potential hazards.