

CHAIRMAN DEBORAH A.P. HERSMAN
CLOSING COMMENTS
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The study adopted by the Safety Board today is an important step towards realizing the full safety benefits of glass cockpit avionics in light aircraft. Our discussion today highlights the dramatic change this evolving technology presents to pilots, regulators, industry and the general aviation community.

While the technology creates enormous opportunities by increasing the types and amount of information available to pilots – which has the potential to improve safety – it also brings with it challenges due to its complexity and rapid development.

Today, nearly all newly manufactured piston-powered light airplanes are equipped with digital primary flight displays. This is a marked change from just a decade, or even 5 years, ago. And the number of older airplanes being retrofitted with these systems continues to grow.

While the technological innovations and flight management tools that glass cockpit equipped airplanes bring to the general aviation community should reduce the number of fatal accidents, we have not – unfortunately – seen that happen.

Glass cockpits are both complex and vary from aircraft to aircraft in function, design and failure modes. To maximize the safety potential of this technology, we must give pilots the information they need to understand the unique operational and functional details of the technology specific to their aircraft. Yet, as this study revealed, pilots may not have this vital information.

As we discussed today, training is clearly one of the key components to reducing the accident rate of light planes equipped with glass cockpits, and this study clearly demonstrates the life and death importance of appropriate training on these complex systems. We know that while many pilots have thousands of hours of experience with conventional flight instruments, that alone is just not enough to prepare them to safely operate airplanes equipped with these glass cockpit features.

The data tell us that equipment-specific training will save lives. So to that end, we have adopted recommendations today responsive to the data – recommendations on pilot knowledge testing standards, training, simulators, documentation and service difficulty reporting so that the potential safety improvements that these systems provide can be realized by the general aviation pilot community.