Organization Formed to Study

Anomalous Aerial Phenomena: Impact on aviation safety

Boulder Creek, CA – December 1, 2000 – National Aviation Reporting Center On Anomalous Phenomena (NARCAP) officials announced today the formation of the only research organization in America organized to improve U.S. aviation safety related to various kinds of unidentified aerial phenomena. NARCAP is a non-profit, scientific organization that will provide pilots and air traffic controllers with a special telephone number, confidential reporting web site, and other means to use to report their sightings to qualified and sympathetic listeners. Ted Roe, NARCAP's executive director said, "our center was developed to help enhance aviation safety by better understanding the nature and potential effects of unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP) upon ground and airborne systems, piloting, and cockpit/aircrew procedures." The center takes no position on the source or nature of such phenomena and prefers to let the data speak for themselves.

"We provide a confidential, telephone and Internet-based reporting system for radar personnel, air traffic controllers, and pilots to use that assists our technical staff in documenting high quality, scientifically relevant data on UAP of many different kinds," Roe stated.

Dr. Richard F. Haines, a retired NASA research scientist and NARCAP's chief scientist, explained why the new organization was formed. "We conducted a thorough, fifty-year review of pilot reports of unidentified aerial phenomena in America and found almost one hundred incidents that appeared to impact aviation safety either directly or indirectly. For instance, we found numerous instances of temporary or permanent disabling of one or more on-board electrical or magnetically controlled systems during close proximity to UAP. We found that many pilots changed their altitude and/or course to avoid a collision with nearby UAP—sometimes with passenger and crew injury—and we found cases of cockpit confusion during these intriguing close encounters. These reports suggest that an unexplained aerial phenomenon does exist and deserves serious scientific study, and that U.S. aviation safety could be adversely affected by UAP under certain circumstances."

Roe outlined the steps which NARCAP will follow to achieve its mission: "We have set up focused technical analysis teams made up of specialists in such areas as aerodynamics, flight control systems, meteorology, aerophysics, astronomy, and other fields. These teams will analyze reports sent in to us via our website (www.NARCAP.org), our toll-free phone line, regular mail, and through face-to-face meetings." He emphasized, "we have worked hard to develop means to safeguard the identity of all reporters and we honor all requests for anonymity. We realize that this is a touchy subject that has evoked ridicule in the past for those who have been brave enough to come forward with a sighting report." Technical reports will be prepared on each case following the general approach used by the national transportation safety board in its aviation accident analyses. NARCAP will also cooperate fully with existing agencies when they request technical assistance. "we also provide summary reports of our findings to interested parties," Roe stressed.

"Our national advisory board is comprised of individuals not only professionally qualified in their own fields but who are open minded about unidentified aerial phenomenon of all kinds," said Dr. Haines. "We call upon them for both technical and policy level advice." NARCAP has a flight simulation capability to assist the pilots in carrying out a flight re-construction. This capability helps us "tease out those small but important hidden details of an incident."

Dr. Haines stated, "based on a comprehensive review of past U.S.. pilot, radar operator, and controller reports, we believe there is a potential and ongoing threat to aviation safety posed by so-called anomalous aerial phenomena. In the same way that wind shear, lightning strikes, bird strikes, and other very low probability of occurrence events can influence aviation safety so can some unidentified aerial phenomena. Pilots must be prepared to deal effectively with them. We would like to work with the nation's airlines to implement special pilot training classes directly related to coping with such close encounters in the air."

Commenting further, Dr. Haines stated that federal aviation authorities have taken wind shear very seriously, requiring special commercial pilot training and installation of costly and sensitive wind shear sensing-reporting equipment at some airports and in the cockpit. Yet UAP appear to occur with equal or greater frequency than does wind shear, UAP have caused transient and permanent effects on cockpit instruments basic to navigation and flight control, and UAP have also contributed to an increase in both pilot and air traffic controller workload due to their unexpected appearance and poorly understood characteristics that can lead to overreactions on the part of aviation personnel.

"Unidentified aerial phenomena must not be disregarded any longer. U.S. aviation officials should face the documented facts and then quietly but effectively introduce procedures and programs to help pilots and controllers cope more effectively with these ubiquitous phenomena. Our science community also should become involved in the serious study of UAP for the common good and we would like to collect the data they need," said Dr. Haines.