



AERONAUTICAL INFORMATION CIRCULAR

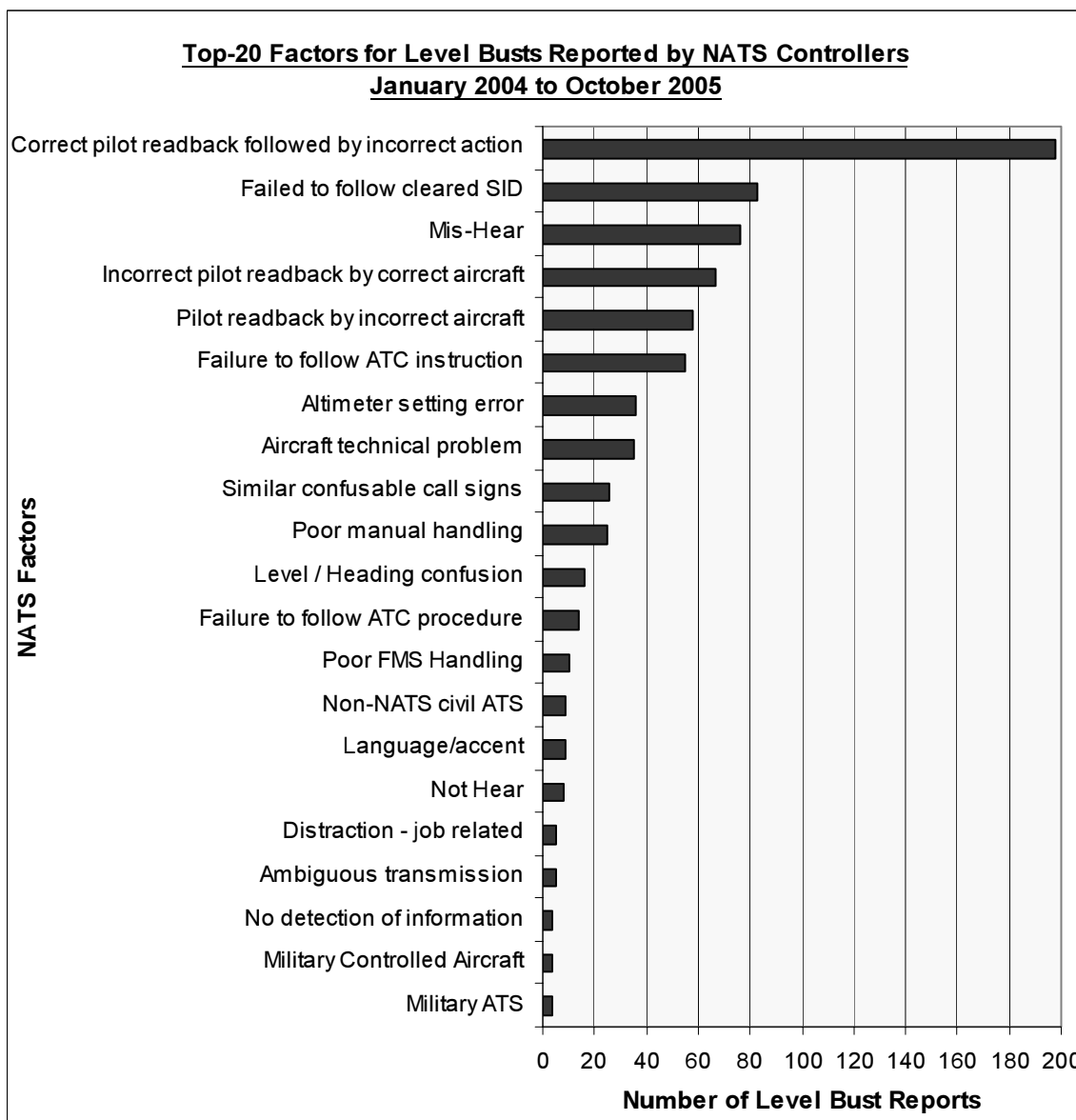
National Air Traffic Services Ltd
Aeronautical Information Service
Control Tower Building, London Heathrow Airport
Hounslow, Middlesex TW6 1JJ
Editorial: 020-8745 3457
Distribution: 0870-8871410 (Tangent Marketing Services Limited)
Content: 01293-573909 (Flight Operations Policy Department (Commercial))
Website: www.ais.org.uk

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LEVEL BUSTS

1 The information contained in this Circular is an analysis of all level busts between January 2004 and October 2005. The graph shows the top-20 factors allocated by National Air Traffic Service Ltd (NATS) for level busts in UK airspace reported by NATS controllers.

1.1 The consequences of a level bust are very serious and pilots' attention is drawn to the most common causes which are 'correct read back' followed by 'incorrect action' and 'failure to follow the Standard Instrument Departure' (SID). Pilots should be aware of their susceptibility to a level bust during busy flight phases of arrival and departure and ensure a high state of operational awareness is maintained at these times paying particular attention to standard radio telephony (RTF) procedures.



Data source: NATS

Note: These are not mutually exclusive - each event can have more than one factor

1.2 NATS defines a Level Bust as 'a deviation of 300 ft or more from an assigned level' (200 ft in RVSM airspace). This is at variance with the ICAO definition ('more than 300 ft from the cleared level') and some of the definitions adopted by airlines. Regardless of the difference, it is important that flight crews continue to report all level busts using the Civil Aviation Authority's (CAA) Mandatory Occurrence Reporting system in order that the CAA and NATS have as much data as possible upon which to base further safety initiatives.

1.3 Operators are encouraged to refer to Flight Operations Department Communication (FODCOM) 13/2005 to seek guidance on procedures that will have a positive effect on potential level busts and help prevent them from happening.

2 The CAA continues to have concerns about these potentially hazardous occurrences. The majority of the factors identified in the above graph are manifestations of human errors in operating techniques or in areas of communications and can be addressed by the use of already established good practice in the use of appropriate and standard RTF phraseology and techniques, together with adherence to established flight crew drills and ATC procedures.

3 The purpose of this Circular is to emphasise the following:

- (a) Aircraft operators' attention is drawn to FODCOM 13/2005 (available from www.caa.co.uk) which provides information on good practice regarding flight crew drills;
- (b) aircraft operators and air traffic control providers are urged to continue to highlight level busts in their ongoing training arrangements and are requested to bring this Circular to the attention of their flight crews, air traffic controllers and other staff who are involved in the training and briefing of these groups;
- (c) flight crews should pay particular attention to level change instructions from ATC and if uncertain of the exact content of a clearance should query the clearance on the RTF and not rely on a read back for confirmation purposes;
- (d) air traffic controllers should actively listen to read backs of instructions to ensure that the read back matches the original instruction and that they do not simply 'hear' what was expected when an incorrect read back has occurred;
- (e) air traffic service providers should take steps to ensure that sector and other airspace capacities are set such that there is adequate time available to flight crews and controllers to allow safe and unhurried interchanges via RTF;
- (f) flight crews should ensure that the vertical as well as the horizontal profile of SID clearances, particularly first and other 'stop' levels, are fully understood and complied with. Air traffic controllers rely on these clearances being accurately followed so that flights depart on deconflicted initial routes. Deviations, particularly from the vertical profile, can severely compromise ATC separation standards in a very short time.

4 More information is also available from the following website: www.levelbust.com

This Circular is issued for information, guidance and necessary action.