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Participation Report for the 2026 FAA-EASA International Aviation Safety Conference

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1. Overview

For three days, from June 16 to 18, 2026, in Chantilly, Virginia, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) held the FAA-EASA International Aviation Safety Conference.[1)]

This conference, hosted annually by the FAA and EASA to discuss international aviation safety, is held alternately in the United States and Europe. As in previous years, aviation authorities from around the world—including the Japanese Civil Aviation Bureau of Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, as well as private-sector organizations such as manufacturers and airlines participated; approximately 400 experts attended this year's event.

The theme of this year's conference was "Safety Together: Innovation, Integration, and Trust," with a particular focus on the handling of new technologies such as AI. As I attended the conference, I will outline its main points below.

Source: Photo by the author

Figure 1: The Westfields Marriott Washington Dulles, where the event was held

2. Report on Policies and Other Matters from the FAA and EASA

(1) Report from the FAA

The FAA explained that 2026 marks the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States, and that the agency is moving forward with initiatives such as establishing new organizations and announcing "Flight Plan 2026."

The new organizations introduced include the Aviation Safety Management (ASM) Organization, which will proactively and preventively utilize and analyze safety data across the industry to reduce safety risks; the Airspace Modernization Organization, which will advance airspace modernization; and the Office of Advanced Aviation Technology, which will address new technologies such as Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) and drones.

Meanwhile, "Flight Plan 2026" is a strategic plan published by the FAA in January 2026, consisting of three pillars: (i) People, (ii) Safety, and (iii) National Airspace System (NAS) Modernization. Specifically, it sets the following goals: a) Hire the best people, give them the best training and tools to achive the best result; b) Create one FAA Safety Management System (SMS); and c) Optimize the National Airspace System to enhance safety and efficiency.[2)]

In particular, the FAA is placing a strong emphasis on airspace modernization, using digital technology, the cloud, and AI to modernize outdated air traffic control infrastructure.

(2) Report from EASA

EASA outlined three priorities: (1) actively identifying risks; (2) enabling innovation; and (3) enhancing efficiency and resilience. It was explained that EASA is working to

identify risks while utilizing AI and machine learning. Given limited resources, it is pursuing "operation-centered certification" from the outset, rather than following the traditional sequence of first design certification, then operational certification, and finally Air Operator Certificate (AOC). It also stressed that leveraging external communities to improve efficiency and digitizing certification platforms are important.

(3) Mutual Cooperation Between FAA and EASA

At the meeting, the FAA and EASA pledged to continue advancing their mutual cooperation while utilizing and adopting technology in the following ways:

- Prioritize cooperation at all organizational levels in line with the U.S. - European Union Aviation Safety Agreement.
- Strengthen information exchange on safety oversight to promote a strong safety culture and advance best practices globally.
- Advance Safety Management Systems (SMS) toward proactive, data-driven decision-making.
- Expand on collaborating and sharing operational data to support rulemaking.
- Streamline the approval processes for advance aviation technologies and operations to harmonize certification pathways.
- Accelerate the safe integration of automated flightdeck technologies to improve crew performance and enhance safety.
- Accelerate the use of Portable Electronic Devices in the cockpit to transform operations with real-time data.
- Modernize aircrew training and simulator capabilities to sustain pilot competence in automated environments.
- Enhance information sharing and improve coordination on emerging safety risks from external challenges including cyber threats, conflict zones, GPS/GNSS interference and extreme weather.
- Work together to support global aviation safety initiatives through collaboration with other regulatory authorities and organizations.[3)]

Source: Photo by the author

Figure 2: Scenes from the Presentation

3. Utilization of New Technologies

(1) Key Discussion Points

As mentioned earlier, the use of new technologies—particularly AI—was a major topic of discussion at this meeting.

In the aviation industry, new technologies have traditionally been introduced only after undergoing rigorous safety validation. However, new technologies such as AI and digitalization are advancing rapidly. Against this backdrop, the following discussions took place regarding how to utilize these new technologies and how to conduct safety validation efficiently:

<u>i) AI-Related</u>

- Since AI is a "black box," conventional software certification standards (DO-178, DO-254) are difficult to apply; verification using vast amounts of data and comparisons with human performance are necessary.
- The approach involves defining AI operational concepts (ConOps) to establish safety objectives, followed by a joint evaluation by air traffic control agencies, operators, training organizations, and others.
- There is potential to utilize AI for analyzing safety data to enable proactive risk management. However, one should not place excessive trust in AI-generated

reports; they must be used in conjunction with the judgment of qualified human professionals.

- It is important to introduce AI step-by-step rather than using it as a core technology from the outset.

ii) Digitalization of Certification Activities

- Both the FAA and EASA are progressively advancing the digitalization of design certification. They are transitioning from paper-based procedures to managing design and compliance data in databases to ensure transparency.
- In Europe, the role of Design Organization Approval (DOA) is becoming increasingly important due to digitalization.
- Industry collaboration, harmonization of digital signature methods, and common data standards will be necessary.

iii) AR and VR

- While the development of pilot simulators using AR and VR is underway, to ensure pilot competence even in these new environments, Competency-Based Training and Assessment—which focuses on the competencies that pilots must possess—is essential, rather than checklist-based training and evaluation. Furthermore, AR and VR simulators are not intended to replace existing devices; Full Flight Simulators (FFS) will continue to be key for training.

iv) New Technologies in General

- Aircraft incorporating numerous new technologies, such as AAM and drones, must maintain the same high level of safety as conventional aircraft. Data collection and analysis are necessary to achieve this.
- Given that regulatory authorities have limited resources when introducing new technologies, one approach is to determine the extent of regulatory involvement through regulatory sandboxes and pilot programs.
- To ensure the smooth and rapid introduction of new technologies, performance-based requirements (which define the ultimate performance to be achieved while allowing flexibility in the methods used) are more effective than prescriptive requirements (which define particular specifications and require their fulfillment), as they provide the industry with greater flexibility. However, performance-based requirements present challenges, such as the time required for coordination between applicants and regulatory authorities during the certification process, and the potential to create barriers for new entrants lacking technical expertise; therefore, efforts by industry-led international standardization organizations to propose certification methods become even more important.
- It is important to involve regulatory authorities at an early stage, for the industry as a whole to promote information sharing and the exchange of opinions, and for operators to share their operational data and training organizations to share their training data with manufacturers.

(2) Direction of the Discussion

In all cases, while the rapid adoption of innovation is important, it was noted that the aviation safety standards maintained to date must be upheld; therefore, it is essential to proceed with adoption step by step while verifying safety at every stage, and to foster greater collaboration among stakeholders, including data sharing. Furthermore, regarding AI in particular, while there is significant potential for its application, it was emphasized that we should not place excessive trust in it and should proceed with its adoption while conducting thorough verification.

4. Other Major Topics

In addition to the above, numerous other safety-related discussions took place, as follows:

(1) Requirements for Drug and Alcohol Testing at Overseas Repair Stations

In 2024, the FAA issued standards requiring drug and alcohol testing at overseas repair stations that maintain

aircraft or components used in scheduled air transport operations under 14 CFR Part 121. The FAA is currently reviewing this Advisory Circular (AC), and in said AC, it plans to present three methods for demonstrating compliance with the standards: a) recognizing overseas maintenance programs that have a framework with equivalent safety levels at the national or facility level; b) full compliance with FAA's 14 CFR Part 120 and the Department of Transportation (DOT)'s 49 CFR Part 40 standards, or c) the availability of waivers or exemptions in cases where the country's rules conflict with these standards.

(2) Interference Issues Between 5G Radio Waves and Aviation Radio Waves

The wireless and aviation industries are engaged in ongoing discussions regarding interference between 5G radio waves used in mobile phones and other devices and aviation radio altimeters and weather radar. In particular, progress has been made on the development of a draft FAA standard for radio altimeters that ensures they are not affected by 5G radio waves.

(3) GNSS Radio Frequency Interference

Incidents of jamming and spoofing of GNSS (Global Navigation Satellite System) are on the rise, causing significant adverse effects on navigation equipment. Pilots need to utilize alternative navigation sensors, employ Receiver Autonomous Integrity Monitoring (RAIM), and strengthen monitoring of Satellite-based Augmentation Systems (SBAS), along with receiving the necessary training for these measures. Air traffic control agencies also need to understand the impacts and develop strategies for predictive monitoring and management.

5. Summary

This report provides an overview of the FAA-EASA International Aviation Safety Conference held in the United States from June 16 to 18, 2026.

While the aviation industry has traditionally ensured a high level of safety through systematic and meticulous safety validation, the process of introducing new technologies has often been time-consuming due to the need for such validation.

With a massive wave of innovation sweeping through the aviation industry, there is no doubt that significant transformation will be required to rapidly adopt new technologies while maintaining a high level of safety. I gained a strong sense that many stakeholders are currently engaged in a process of trial and error to determine how to achieve this. While there is no single, clear-cut solution, it is considered crucial for stakeholders to actively share information from an early stage, cooperate transparently, and address issues one by one in a systematic manner.

References

1) AAAE, FAA-EASA International Aviation Safety Conference
https://aaae.org/aviationsafety

2) FAA Flight Plan 2026
https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/flight-plan2026.pdf

3) FAA, FAA and EASA Pledge Cooperation for the New Era of Aviation
https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/faa-and-easa-pledge-cooperation-new-era-aviation