



## Turn Off, Tune In Sets New Controllers on Path to Avoid Distractions (5/31/2013)

Future controllers are learning how to avoid and manage distractions before they ever have a chance to be distracted, thanks to a collaborative effort by the FAA Air Traffic Organization and NATCA.

Air Traffic SUPCOM National Chair Bob Hildebidle and Garth Koleszar, NATCA's national lead for Professional Standards, were at the FAA Academy earlier this month to speak to students about professionalism and distractions as part of the Turn Off, Tune In campaign.

Turn Off, Tune In, a joint effort by NATCA and the FAA, seeks to inform controllers about the dangers of distractions and help them learn how to manage and avoid them.

During their discussions with nearly 150 Academy students in various stages of training, Koleszar and Hildebidle explained that there are two types of distractions.

One type, duty distractions, are a normal function of a controller performing his or her job. They include things like on-the-job training and coordination with a controller at the next position or an operations supervisor.

Those activities are always going to be a necessary part of air traffic control, so Koleszar shared ways of reducing their impact on controllers' focus.

One of the key ways to reduce impact is to make sure controllers are aware of the distractions.

"Studies show that in a place where we have distractions, making employees aware of those distractions reduces mistakes," he said.

In fact, studies found that making individuals aware of a potential distraction improves their performance, even if the distraction never occurs.

Awareness also helps with the other type of distractions: non-duty distractions. Those include things like electronic devices, facility tours and casual conversations.

"What we're trying to create out there is a thought concept that allows somebody to get to a correct decision on their own," Koleszar said. "So they can recognize that this is a distraction, this is going to impact my and my coworkers' focus and the professionalism of this career field, and here are the steps I am going to take to mitigate those impacts."

To help motivate those decisions, Hildebidle and Koleszar shared examples of tragedies that were caused, at least in part, by distractions, including a helicopter crash that the National Transportation Safety Board determined was partially the result of the pilot texting during his preflight routine.

"It drives home the point to begin the conversations on distractions," Hildebidle said. "This is a serious matter. You have the power to make a decision if you understand the impact."



*NATCA's Garth Koleszar (left) and Air Traffic SUPCOM National Chair Bob Hildebidle discuss distractions and professionalism with students at the FAA Academy.*

Fortunately, there were no stories to tell from air traffic controllers. And Hildebidle and Koleszar hope the proactive campaign will keep it that way.

They are developing a plan to make the discussion about distractions and professionalism a permanent part of the training curriculum at the Academy. Koleszar likened it to ethics and professionalism courses doctors take early in medical school.

"This is the first time people start to socialize with other people in their career field," he said. "It's the best time to introduce these kinds of concepts. That way, when they get to the facility, it's already ingrained in them."

"We're hoping to capitalize on the opportunity to set the tone when they're brand new in the career field and the agency," Hildebidle said.



*NATCA's lead for Professional Standards Garth Koleszar (right) talks to students about distractions.*