

Laser Crime

The incidence of laser devices being shone at aircraft in flight has grown exponentially between 2007 and 2010 - in 2010 there were over 1,400 recorded laser attacks on aircraft alone, which was a 100 per cent increase on the previous year; the Civil Aviation Authority attribute the cause of a dramatic increase in incidents (in 2007 there were only 29 attacks) to the increasing affordability and availability of laser devices on the Internet.

Most of the attacks happened near large regional airports, as airliners on final approach were targeted from nearby streets and open spaces. However, smaller airports do suffer similar incidents - two locally-based aircraft were targeted during one evening in November 2009.

Aircraft are particularly vulnerable during crucial phases of flight such as take-off and landing. Distracting the pilots with high intensity light during these phases endangers the lives of people onboard the aircraft and on the ground; helicopters are highly susceptible.

In 2010 a new law came into force making the shining of a light or laser at an aircraft so as to dazzle or distract the pilot a specific criminal offence. Offenders can still also be charged under the more general offence of recklessly endangering an aircraft. The police service have brought a number of successful prosecutions to court which have resulted in significant sanctions for the offender, including jail terms.

Gloucestershire Airport urges members of the public who witness lasers being shone in proximity to aerodrome to contact the police immediately.