

Las Vegas lasers shut down

ALAN STAATS/PHOENIX

HOTEL AND CASINO operators in Las Vegas have been ordered to suspend their laser displays following an incident involving a Southwest Airlines Boeing 737 first officer being temporarily blinded by a burst of laser light.

The event occurred even though the hotel involved uses a traffic-collision-avoidance system (TCAS) to turn off the laser when aircraft approach.

The incident, which took place on 30 October, 1995, happened as the 737 was passing through 7,000ft (2,000m) in a right turn-out after leaving Las Vegas McCarran Airport. The first officer, who was flying the aircraft at the time, was "...unable to see for about 2min" because of the light, according to Brian Calendine, the US Federal Aviation Administration flight-safety official in Las Vegas.

Following an investigation by

the FAA and the US Food and Drug Administration (which licenses the lasers), operators have been ordered to suspend their use temporarily, pending the establishment of new aiming, beam dispersion and power-output guidelines for users within 30km (20 miles) of McCarran Airport.

"One of the biggest problems with these displays," Calendine says, "is the fact that the beams of light are so narrow and concentrated that, even ten miles out from the source, the beam spread is still only 20-30ft wide in some cases."

While there has been no official determination of the beam's origin, it is widely believed to have been generated by the Las Vegas Hilton's outdoor laser show.

According to hotel president Gary Gregg, the hotel's "...primary concern is safety".

He says that, in addition to compliance measures, "...we have made every effort to ensure that our laser attraction, built for entertainment,

went beyond safety guidelines".

Gregg says that those efforts have included the installation, in June 1995, of a TCAS.

The system has also been modified to establish a protective zone around each of the laser fountain's beams.

Once an aircraft enters the zone, the beam automatically shuts off until the aircraft has travelled a safe distance from the beam. It is not known whether the system was in operation at the time of the Southwest Airlines incident.

According to sources at the McCarran Airport tower, the episode was the 51st to be reported to air traffic control and tower personnel in the two years since the first display was installed.

Similar incidents have been reported elsewhere in the world. The first officer, whose name was not released, was treated by an ophthalmologist and subsequently cleared for flight operations shortly after the event. □

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ CARGO PLAN

Hong Kong Air Cargo Terminals (HACTL) has unveiled plans for a HK\$7.8 billion (\$1 billion) multi-storey cargo-handling site at Hong Kong's new Chek Lap Kok Airport. The Super-Terminal 1 will cover 274,000m² (25,500ft²), with a further 46,000m² set aside for a dedicated express centre, and will be capable of handling 2.6 million tonnes of cargo per annum.

■ MAINTENANCE ACCORD

BFGoodrich Aerospace has signed a ten-year agreement with Colorado-based Western Pacific Airlines to provide maintenance services for the low-cost carrier's entire fleet, including aircraft and component overhaul. BFGoodrich's Tramco division recently received a major contract to maintain American West's aircraft.

Premier service from Manchester

SPANISH CHARTER company Centennial Airlines has added a scheduled Manchester-Palma service to its successful Palma link from London Gatwick. The new service, marketed under the Centennial Premier label, began on 15 December and will initially be flown once a week, with a second flight scheduled from March.

Centennial Premier provides the only direct schedule between the two cities. The new service is

targeted at the villa and timeshare market, as well as the corporate business traveller.

The upmarket service strategy, allied to competitive fares, is proving successful on the Gatwick-Palma route, where load factors average between 85% and 90% and frequency has recently been increased to three flights a week.

Both services are operated with two-class McDonnell Douglas MD-83 twinjets. □



Charter company Centennial is to build on a successful scheduled venture

Eurocontrol invites tenders for POEMS radar

EUROCONTROL, THE European air-traffic management organisation, has issued an invitation to tender for the development of two Pre-Operational Mode S (POEMS) radar ground stations.

Manufacturers have been invited to bid for the construction of two new ground stations in France and the UK, with a third station in

Germany to be upgraded from a monopulse secondary-surveillance radar station. The stations are to be available in mid-1999 for evaluation and interoperability testing.

The POEMS is aimed at the progressive implementation of Mode S enhanced surveillance in Europe, within the framework of the European Air Traffic Control Harmonisation and Integration

Programme. It also provides the foundation for a Mode S-based air-ground datalink, one objective defined in the European Civil Aviation Conference's (ECAC) *en route* strategy.

Mode S is to be initially installed in Europe's high air-traffic density areas, and subsequently throughout the ECAC area.

Eurocontrol says that the

POEMS is "an important milestone in the development of the European Mode S programme". It is being conducted by the organisation with support from Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK.

The contracts are expected to be issued in the first half of this year, and will be managed by the states sharing in the project's funding. □