

Risks of Illegal Charters



You've done the research, and have decided chartering an aircraft is a reasonable alternative to airline travel for your business or family. You open the *Yellow Pages*, and call the first two aviation companies you find. Both offer similar types of aircraft for your flight, but one supplies a significantly lower quote. Why?

Illegal air charter operations are prevalent around much of the U.S. One review of South Florida's *Yellow Pages* and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) records indicated that 14 of the companies listed were operating a charter business illegally. But you were offered a **really** good deal – who cares if the operator is fudging the books a little? **You should!**

Risks of Illegal Charters:

- **Oversight** – The FAA and Transportation Security Administration (TSA) have much more stringent oversight of legal Part 135 charter operators than their illegal counterparts. This leads to a safer, more secure operation.
- **Accountability** – The FAA holds the legal Part 135 certificate holder to a very high standard, and holds the certificate holder accountable for their actions or omissions.
- **Training** – Pilots of legal Part 135 operations engage in mandatory indoctrination training upon employment and rigorous recurrent training every six months. Flight checks by senior pilots are administered regularly. Pilots of illegal operations are only required to undergo a flight check every two years.
- **Maintenance** – Aircraft used in legal Part 135 charter operations must be maintained to very strict standards, and only highly trained maintenance personnel may perform maintenance on these aircraft.
- **Drug and Alcohol Testing** – Crewmembers and maintenance personnel for legal Part 135 operations must undergo pre-employment and random drug and alcohol testing. Illegal operators typically do not test their employees.

- **Experience** – Legal Part 135 charter operations require a high level of experience from their management personnel and pilots. Management personnel must have at least three years experience in the industry within the past six years, and pilots must have at least 1,200 hours of total flight time.
- **Insurance Coverage** – The U.S. Department of Transportation requires a minimum level of insurance coverage prior to obtaining a Part 135 certificate. Illegal charter operators may not have adequate insurance to cover injuries or loss of life or property if an accident occurs.

How to Determine if Your Operator is Legal:

- If the deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Legal operators incur relatively high overhead costs to maintain the aircraft, train and test crewmembers, and stay compliant with FAA and TSA regulations. Illegal operators are able to offer significantly lower prices, but at much greater risk.
- Ask the operator for their certificate number. A legal operator will be pleased to deal with an educated consumer.
- Call your local Flight Standards District Office and inquire about the operator's safety and compliance record. You can find this number in your White Pages Phone Book, in the United States Government listings (the Blue Pages section) under the heading, "Federal Aviation Administration." You can also find information on-line at http://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/field_offices/fsdo.

**More information on how to charter an aircraft is available in NATA's
*"Chartering an Aircraft: A Consumer Guide to Help You Fly Smarter."***

**NATA offers this guide for download free of charge to consumers at
<http://www.nata.aero/about/CharterGuide.jsp>.**