



AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION

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March 21, 2005

Mr. Neal Shapiro
President, NBC News
30 Rockefeller Plaza
New York, NY 10112

Dear Mr. Shapiro:

Last Monday, March 14, 2005, the *New York Times* published a story about a confidential government report concerning aviation and the nation's security. The story focused largely on one paragraph of a 24-page overview that was intended as a primer for law enforcement personnel not familiar with the aviation sector. The *Times* story fed a media firestorm that, in turn, created needless public concern and fear about general aviation (GA) security. In that environment your network treated the story in a fair and balanced manner.

And for that we commend you.

However, your network also chose to feature Charles Slepian as an aviation expert. In so doing, you used a source who grossly misrepresented the facts, especially as they pertain to general aviation. As a result, your news department's editorial standards were, in our opinion, badly jeopardized, doing a grave disservice to your viewers and other key stakeholders. Here are but a few examples of egregious misstatements Mr. Slepian made this week:

Mr Slepian said...	The facts are...
(on Fox): ...General aviation airports are left unsecured and airplanes are left with keys in them. (Host [disbelieving]): <i>Keys?</i> <u>Slepian</u> : Yes, sir, <u>keys are in the ignition.</u>	Airplanes are very expensive machines. If someone is going to lock up their car – and we all do, they will take all necessary steps needed to protect and secure a \$100,000+ investment.
(Fox Host): Are you telling me – could you possibly hot-wire a 757? <u>Slepian</u> : Well, you won't have to because you have all the ability to just hit the switch and take the plane off the ground if it's at a general aviation airport.	AOPA is not aware of any 757s that are based at a GA airport. Airplanes of that value have very sophisticated security systems and are not easily accessed. It is a very complex procedure to start a commercial airliner's engines. Or to taxi it or take off.
(on <i>NBC Nightly News</i>) Two hundred pounds of fertilizer in a Cessna flying into a building gives us an Oklahoma City situation.	The Oklahoma City bomb was comprised of approximately 4800 pounds of ammonium nitrate that were mixed with diesel fuel. Many countries closely regulate the sale of ammonium nitrate. That should have been a major story component,

We are incredulous that NBC News would allow his irresponsible and inflammatory statement to air -- *totally unchallenged*. Furthermore, in our opinion, Mr. Slepian has an inherent conflict of interest in that he stands to profit directly by misinforming the public -- while creating widespread and totally unjustified fear -- about GA.

We strongly urge you not to risk your journalistic credibility and instead seek well-informed sources on matters as complex and important as GA security. We will be delighted to provide you with any current information on GA that you may require as well as point you to independent, credible sources – devoid of any conflict of interest – who you can confidently use as experts in any future reports.

Sincerely,

Jeff Myers
Executive Vice President, Communications