

NASA wants to smooth bumpy plane rides

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Most airline passengers and even flight crews don't like turbulence, so NASA researchers have developed an automatic turbulence reporting system.

The researchers at NASA's Langley Research Center in Hampton, Va., and AeroTech Research (USA) Inc. of Newport News, Va., have developed the Turbulence Auto-PIREP, or pilot reporting, System.

TAPS is being tested on more than 80 Delta Airlines passenger jets. The device warns pilots of turbulence so they can maneuver to avoid it or ensure passengers and flight attendants are seated and strapped in.

"TAPS automatically broadcasts turbulence encounter reports from aircraft and allows other planes and people on the ground to use this information," said NASA's Turbulence Prediction and Warning Systems project manager Jim Watson.

Researchers said TAPS provides real-time turbulence information that has never been available. Paul Robinson, president of AeroTech Research, added, "The beauty of TAPS is, it is only software and uses equipment already on the aircraft, making it inexpensive and easy to install."

The National Aeronautics and Safety Administration says atmospheric turbulence is the leading cause of injuries to passengers and flight crews in non-fatal airline accidents.

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