



The nation's last fatal airline crash occurred on Feb. 12, 2009, when Continental flight 3407 crashed into a suburban Buffalo home and erupted into flames, killing all 49 people aboard and one person on the ground. *Photo by Associated Press*

Decline in fatal air crashes presents safety dilemma

By JOAN LOWY
Associated Press

WASHINGTON | It's been 43 months since the last deadly airline crash in the United States, the longest period without a fatal domestic accident since commercial aviation expanded after World War II.

could be the single biggest reason the (Federal Aviation Administration) isn't able to act proactively and ensure safety into the future," said Bill Voss, president of the industry-funded Flight Safety Foundation in Alexandria, Va., which promotes global airline safety. The past decade has been the air-

far he's had no takers.

Last year, the FAA missed a congressionally mandated deadline for issuing new regulations on pilot training. Congress ordered the new rules after the nation's last fatal airline crash, on Feb. 12, 2009, when a startled captain overrode a key safety system as his

That sounds like unvarnished good news, but one consequence of having such a remarkable record is that it's difficult to justify imposing costly new safety rules on the economically fragile industry.

In analyzing costs and benefits, federal rules assign a value of \$6.2 million to each life saved. Even modest changes in regulations can cost the industry hundreds of millions of dollars when spread across a number of years.

"The extraordinary safety record that has been achieved in the United States ironically

line industry's safest ever.

Last year, the FAA revised rules on pilot work schedules and rest periods to address concerns that tired pilots were making mistakes, sometimes with fatal results. But the agency dropped requirements that would have extended the new rules to cargo carriers. FAA officials said the rule changes would have cost the cargo industry as much as \$300 million over 10 years.

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood has urged cargo executives to voluntarily comply with the new rules, but so

airliner lost lift and began to stall.

An investigation showed the plane would have been able to fly had the captain responded correctly. Instead, it plummeted into a house near Buffalo, N.Y., killing all 49 people aboard and a man in the home. Investigators cited pilot training lapses by the regional airline, Colgan Air, as a factor. Regulators had proposed new rules just before the Colgan crash but effectively withdrew them for more work after the accident. Final rules aren't scheduled to be issued until next year.