

News story: Tough new penalties for misuse of lasers

People who target transport operators with laser devices could be jailed for up to 5 years under new laws designed to protect the public.

The Laser Misuse (Vehicles) Bill, which was published today (Wednesday, 20 December 2017), will also expand the list of vehicles, beyond just planes, which it is an offence to target with lasers.

Drivers of trains and buses, captains of boats and even pilots of hovercraft will be among those protected by the new legislation.

The bill will make it easier to prosecute offenders by removing the need to prove an intention to endanger a vehicle.

And it will remove the cap on the amount offenders can be fined – which is currently limited to £2,500 – paving the way for substantial sanctions. Fines could be issued in isolation or alongside a prison sentence.

The police will also be given additional powers to catch those responsible for the misuse of lasers.

[Animation video](#)

Aviation Minister, Baroness Sugg said:

Lasers can dazzle, distract or blind those in control of a vehicle, with serious and potentially even fatal consequences.

The government is determined to protect pilots, captains, drivers and their passengers and take action against those who threaten their safety.

Alongside their existing powers of arrest and the ability to search a person once arrested, officers will no longer need to establish proof of intention endanger to a vehicle, aircraft or vessel, making it easier to prosecute swiftly. It will be an offence to shine or direct a laser towards a vehicle if it dazzles or distracts the operator, if done deliberately or if reasonable precautions to avoid doing so are not taken.

Laser pens have become a growing concern with the beam from the devices capable of affecting the ability of transport operators to control their vehicles.

Last year, the Civil Aviation Authority received reports of 1,258 laser incidents, with Heathrow the most frequent location for reports of the devices being used recklessly.

Earlier this year, the [Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy ran a call for evidence on the selling of laser pointers and is considering the findings before formally responding in the new year.](#)

BALPA General Secretary, Brian Strutton said:

This is good news for transport safety. BALPA pilots and other transport workers have raised the growing threat of laser attacks for some time.

The government's announcement of a bill to tackle the misuse of lasers is therefore very welcome and we will work with DfT to ensure its effective and speedy implementation.

BALPA also welcomes the BEIS consultation on restrictions to the supply of certain lasers which we hope will move forward quickly.

[Laser promotional video](#)

National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Lasers, Commander Simon Bray said:

Recklessly shining a laser at an aircraft or another moving vehicle is deeply irresponsible and dangerous. By causing a distraction or, in some cases, short or long-term eye damage, laser attacks can lead to catastrophic incidents.

These new and robust measures send a clear message to perpetrators: laser attacks are a crime and serious consequences will follow from committing this offence.

It is essential that the police have the powers required to support these measures and we will continue to work with the government to ensure that these powers are in place.