

Dangers of Shining Laser Pens at Aircraft

If you aim a laser beam into the sky, it may seem to end. However, the beam actually continues even if the light is no longer scattered back to your eyes. Some people have been arrested because they thought the beam could not reach an aircraft – but it definitely can!

Obviously, seeing laser beams and flashes is distracting to pilots. This is one reason you should never aim at or near an aircraft. (Please bear in mind that the beam can be traced right back down to the laser's location. This makes it easy for a police helicopter to direct ground officers for an arrest).

Another problem is that the beam is much larger at long distances than you might think. Even though the laser projects a small, millimeter-sized dot close up, at longer distances the beam can be many inches across. When the beam hits the windscreen of a cockpit, or the bubble of a helicopter, imperfections in and on the glass spread the light out even more.

Laser light in the pilot's eyes causes glare (inability to see past the light). At higher power levels, it can also cause temporary flashblindness and afterimages (like when you look at a bright camera flash, and cannot see for many seconds afterwards).

To make things even worse, a pilot being targeted may also be worried about eye damage and eye injuries, and the possibility of the laser being an aiming device on a weapon. A worried pilot is a distracted pilot -- not a good thing during critical flight phases such as landings, takeoffs and emergency maneuvers.

For all these reasons and especially due to the distraction, glare and flashblindness effects – you should NEVER point a laser towards an aircraft.

The police will locate any persons misusing lasers towards aircraft and will prosecute. (Air Navigation Order 2009 - lights which dazzle or distract).