

Safety News

FAA Criticized on Oversight Role

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is relying too heavily on air carriers' oversight of outsourced maintenance repair stations, according to an audit by the U.S. Transportation Department's Office of Inspector General (OIG).

The audit, conducted at the request of the U.S. House of Representatives transportation committee, said that, to reduce operating costs, air carriers are increasingly likely to outsource their maintenance. When this is done, the maintenance repair station conducting the work becomes, for audit purposes, an extension of the carrier's maintenance organization, subject to monitoring by the FAA.

The FAA has certificated 4,159 domestic and 709 foreign repair stations to perform maintenance on U.S. aircraft. The nine major U.S. air carriers reviewed by the OIG for the audit used outsourced repair stations in 2007 to perform 71 percent of their heavy airframe maintenance checks, the audit report said. In 2003, that figure was 34 percent.

The audit report said that carriers' oversight procedures for outsourced maintenance are "not always sufficient."

"FAA and air carriers must continually improve their oversight of repair stations to ensure that safety measures keep pace with the changing nature of the industry," the audit report said. "Although FAA has taken important steps to move its safety oversight toward a risk-based system, the agency still faces challenges in determining where the most critical maintenance occurs and ensuring sufficient oversight."

In addition, the audit found that the FAA "did not have an adequate system for determining how much and where the most critical maintenance occurs, [did not] have a specific policy governing when certificate management inspectors should visit repair stations performing substantial maintenance, [did not] require inspectors to validate that repair stations have corrected deficiencies identified in air carrier audits, and [did not] have adequate controls to ensure that inspectors document inspection findings in the national database and review related findings by other inspectors."

The audit's recommendations included a call for the FAA to implement a system for determining when and where critical maintenance is



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performed, to ensure that FAA inspectors conduct inspections of maintenance providers and to ensure that air carriers provide the repair stations that they use "with clearer guidance on how to perform maintenance and inspections." The FAA already is addressing the issue with a rulemaking change "but needs to pursue interim actions to establish agreements between air carriers and repair stations on maintenance procedures," the audit said.

Croatian Aviation Safety Faulted

Croatia is not complying with safety standards established by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said after an evaluation of safety provisions.



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The FAA, through its International Aviation Safety Assessment program, regularly evaluates civil aviation authorities in all countries with air carriers that operate — or might be authorized to operate — flights to the United States.

Following the review, the FAA gave Croatia a Category 2 rating, which means that the country either lacks the laws or regulations to oversee its air carriers in accordance with ICAO standards or that its civil aviation authority is deficient in at least one area, such as technical expertise or inspection procedures.

The Category 2 rating also means that Croatian air carriers cannot establish service to the United States. Croatia has told the FAA that it is working to establish a safety oversight system that will comply with ICAO standards and recommended practices.

Cowling Separations

Current preflight procedures to ensure that engine fan cowlings are latched properly may be inadequate, the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) says, citing its investigations of several recent incidents in which cowlings have separated during flight.

The most recent of four incidents cited by the NTSB involved a US Airways Bombardier CL-600-2B19, which lost part of the right engine upper fan cowling during flight at 11,000 ft. None of the 53 people in the airplane was injured in the incident; the airplane received minor damage.

In this incident, as well as the three others, the NTSB found that the latches on the cowling were not properly fastened after maintenance performed before the flights. In one case, the NTSB also cited a first officer's failure to follow the checklist during a walk-around inspection.

The NTSB described separations of engine fan cowlings as an ongoing problem and noted that records from Bombardier, Airbus, foreign investigations and the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) showed that "since 1992, there have been 15 events involving Airbus [single aisle] model airplanes ... ; another 26 engine fan [cowling] separations occurred on 17 different airplane models since 1992.

"In addition, [NTSB] queries to Bombardier revealed 33 domestic and foreign cases of engine fan [cowling] separations (including six cases in 2007 alone), dating back to January 2001."

The NTSB said that the cowling separations have continued to occur in Airbus airplanes and Bombardier CL-600s despite a 2003 FAA airworthiness directive and a number of service bulletins. However, the NTSB found that Airbus operators that



required dual-inspection signoffs to confirm that maintenance personnel latched the cowlings had been successful in preventing accidents and incidents.

The NTSB recommended that the FAA require operators of Airbus airplanes and Bombardier CL-600s to revise maintenance manual procedures and inspection documents to require dual-inspection signoffs to confirm that the cowlings have been latched after any maintenance that requires an engine fan cowling to be opened.

Other recommendations called for requiring maintenance personnel who work on these aircraft to inform flight crews if the cowlings have been opened before flight; requiring operators to provide guidance on conducting inspections; and determining the extent of the separation problem on all airplanes and, if it is widespread, requiring operators to institute dual-inspection signoffs after engine maintenance.

Original ASAP for Pilots Disbanded

Flight Safety Foundation President and CEO William R. Voss has expressed disappointment at the demise of the American Airlines Aviation Safety Action Program (ASAP) for pilots — one of the earliest airline safety reporting programs.

ASAP encourages pilots and other airline employees to report safety-related incidents confidentially and without fear that they might be penalized for their reporting. Pilot participation ended in mid-October, when the airline management and its pilot employees were unable to agree on provisions to continue.

Voss said that development of ASAP in 1994 made American Airlines a leader in aviation safety.

"Airlines around the world modeled their own internal reporting programs after ASAP," Voss said. "Flight Safety Foundation has publicly supported this program and others like it as an important tool to prevent accidents. We are alarmed that either side would allow this incredibly important safety program to fall victim to distrust between labor and management. We strongly urge both sides to return to the bargaining table to get this program back online.

"The entire industry is facing difficult times and disputes are inevitable, but no one should ever allow safety to become a bargaining chip."



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African Challenges

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has completed a seminar and workshop that officials say has provided a foundation for a safer and more efficient air transport system across the continent.

“With completion of this first seminar and workshop, participating African states are in a much better position to successfully meet the very serious safety challenges that confront the region,” said Roberto Kobeh González, president of the ICAO Council.

Participants from 19 African countries attended the two-week session in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The seminar and workshop were intended to enhance safety through greater cooperation among governments and members of the aviation community. The agenda included intensive discussions of safety management systems as a “predictive approach” to aviation safety, ICAO said.

The seminar coincided with the introduction of reduced vertical separation minimum (RVSM) airspace over Africa in a continuation of the worldwide implementation of RVSM. The move means that a minimum vertical separation of 1,000 ft is permitted for eligible aircraft between Flight Level (FL) 290 and FL 410; the previous minimum vertical separation requirement was 2,000 ft.



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Parachuting Recommendations

The U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has issued a series of recommendations for parachute jump operators, including measures to strengthen requirements for maintenance and pilot training, and to require more effective safety restraints.

The NTSB action followed release of a special investigative report identifying recurring safety issues in jump operations. The NTSB developed the special report as a result of its investigation of the fatal July 2006 crash of a de Havilland DHC-6-100 during takeoff from Sullivan (Missouri, U.S.) Regional Airport for a sky-diving flight.



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In Other News ...

Regulations have taken effect in **Australia** requiring random alcohol and drug testing of 120,000 aviation workers; the new testing requirements will affect pilots, cabin crewmembers, maintenance technicians, flight instructors, fuelers, dispatchers, load controllers, baggage handlers and Civil Aviation Safety Authority staff members with airside duties. ... In the aftermath of several stall-on-rotation incidents, including two fatal crashes, **Bombardier** has issued new training materials for operation of CRJ100/200/440 regional jets and CL600/850 corporate jets when icing conditions are present. The materials are on the Bombardier training Web site at <www.batraining.com>. ... The number of fatal accidents involving European commercial air transport operations decreased to three in 2007, down from six in 2006, the **European Aviation Safety Agency** says.

Runway Status Lights

Runway status lights (ASW, 9/08, p. 46) will be installed over the next three years at 22 major U.S. airports in what U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Acting Administrator Robert A. Sturgell says is a “big step for safety” in the effort to reduce runway incursions.

The FAA has awarded a three-year, US\$131 million contract to Sensis Corp. of Syracuse, New York, U.S., to install the lights, which are designed to automatically warn pilots if it is unsafe to enter or taxi across a runway, or to take off.

The lights will be installed at airports that also will use airport surface detection equipment Model X (ASDE-X), which combines surface-movement radar and transponder sensors to provide airport

tower air traffic controllers with display information on aircraft and vehicle ground positions. Enhanced versions of ASDE-X automatically alert controllers to imminent ground collisions. The runway status lights also will receive ASDE-X data.

Runway status light prototypes at international airports in Dallas and San Diego have been effective in averting runway conflicts, Sturgell said.



U.S. Federal Aviation Administration

Compiled and edited by Linda Werfelman.