



May 11, 2009

## **Oppose Efforts to Block FAA Inspections of Foreign Aircraft Repair Stations**

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO (TTD) I want to express our support for the aircraft repair station safety provisions included in the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Act of 2009 (H.R. 915). We understand that some foreign and corporate interests are attempting to remove language in Section 303 of the bill mandating that foreign repair stations certified by the FAA to work on U.S. aircraft be inspected at least twice per year. I urge you to oppose these efforts.

Over the years, U.S. airlines have steadily increased outsourcing of maintenance work performed at facilities here and abroad. According to the Department of Transportation Inspector General (IG), major air carriers outsourced an average of 64 percent of their maintenance expenses in 2007 compared to 37 percent in 1996. For heavy airframe maintenance work performed in the same year – which includes complete teardowns of aircraft that can take up to seven weeks – the figure jumps to 71 percent. Moreover, U.S. air carriers outsource 27 percent of heavy maintenance work overseas.

Under current practice, FAA inspectors are charged with certifying foreign repair stations and then re-certifying them approximately every two years. With the increasing amount of repair work being outsourced to the 700 FAA-certified foreign facilities, inspectors have expressed serious concern that safety issues are not being addressed. In order to uphold the highest safety standards at all FAA-certified facilities, FAA inspectors must be permitted to physically inspect foreign repair stations twice per year.

Current regulations do not provide adequate time and resources for appropriate follow-up actions to be taken in response to safety problems identified at repair stations. For instance, in many cases if an issue is detected at a foreign repair facility, inspectors often have to wait until the following year or longer to validate whether the problem has been addressed. Section 303 of H.R. 915 addresses this problem by requiring FAA inspections of foreign repair stations at least twice a year.

In addition, we have long argued that the FAA does not hold foreign repair stations and their workers to the same safety standards as those imposed on U.S.-based repair stations. For example, while U.S. mechanics employed either at U.S. carriers or third-party contractors are subject to drug and alcohol testing, mechanics at foreign repair stations working on the same aircraft are not held to equivalent rules. To address this problem, Section 303 also mandates that

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workers at foreign repair stations working on U.S. aircraft are subject to the same drug and alcohol testing rules as workers at U.S. stations.

Some in the European Union (EU) have led the charge against Section 303 and clearly want the right to inspect FAA-certified stations without FAA involvement. In fact, the EU expects that a recent Bilateral Aviation Safety Agreement (BASA) entered into with the U.S. will preclude regular inspections by FAA personnel. We are strongly opposed to these efforts.

There is simply no substitute for direct FAA oversight of work performed on U.S. aircraft because the FAA would have no practical or reliable way to ensure the quality of inspections performed by foreign inspectors. Our government should not be outsourcing safety inspections to foreign governments.

According to the IG, foreign authorities do not always provide the FAA with sufficient information about what was inspected and the problems discovered. In fact, the IG report revealed that inspection documents given to the FAA were found to be incomplete or incomprehensible in 14 out of 16 files (88 percent). The IG even stated that at least one foreign authority representative said that “they did not feel it was necessary to review FAA-specific requirements when conducting repair inspections.”

Opponents of Section 303 also claim that requiring two FAA inspections per year will cause the EU to retaliate by conducting reciprocal twice-a-year inspections of EASA-certified U.S. stations. According to EASA, the repair station costs will increase over 3,000 percent; however the EU has offered no rationale for this inflated figure. The fact is that nothing in this legislation requires EASA to increase the number of times it inspects its U.S.-based certified facilities; that decision will rest exclusively with European regulators. Threatening to implement a self-imposed mandate that could cancel thousands of EASA certificates is just the latest EU scare tactic designed to influence U.S. aviation policy. Simply put, the U.S. has an obligation to ensure that FAA-certified repair stations meet U.S. standards, and we cannot abrogate this responsibility based on threats of retaliation from foreign interests.

For these reasons, I urge you to oppose any efforts to remove Section 303 from H.R. 915 or to otherwise weaken the repair station safety provisions included in this bill. If you have any questions about this matter, please contact me directly or Mia Clarkson at 202/628-9262.

Sincerely,



Edward Wytkind  
President