



A bold voice for transportation workers

FAA MUST HIRE MORE TECHNICAL OPERATIONS STAFF

Employees in the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Air Traffic Organization (ATO) are the backbone of the nation's air traffic control system. The Technical Operations workforce maintains the critical navigation, communications, and radar equipment that controllers and pilots need. Even as the country went into lockdown in March 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, airway transportation systems specialists in Technical Operations remained on the job along with thousands of their FAA colleagues. These employees are represented by the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists, AFL-CIO (PASS).

However, severe staffing shortages within Technical Operations must be resolved by the FAA before something dire happens when needed equipment fails and there aren't enough technicians available to fix it. Since 2014, the Technical Operations workforce has diminished to a level that could lead to crises regarding the maintenance, repair, and certification of the National Airspace System (NAS). In October 2014, there were 5,810 technical employees, steadily declining to approximately 4,839 as of May 1, 2022. The FAA needs to address the staffing shortage among this vital workforce so the NAS has the integral staff (fully trained) required to keep the world's largest, safest, most complex air traffic control system operating properly. New hires in these areas of operation undergo extensive training that can last months, if not years. This potential crisis is exacerbated because training slowed considerably due to the pandemic, which stopped technical education for up-and-coming Technical Operations staff. In addition, as more technicians reach retirement age, there aren't enough fully trained employees to step into their shoes.

To alleviate this, the FAA should develop a multi-year workforce plan for all Technical Operations positions to establish current and future workforce needs to preserve the performance standard of FAA facilities and equipment, considering that the FAA's portfolio will remain a mix of new and legacy facilities and equipment. Specifically, the workforce plan must include annual attrition and hiring estimates to ensure the FAA's workforce maintains the skillsets needed to deploy emerging technologies, ATC modernization, and legacy equipment. Simply developing a Technical Operations staffing model based on the current workforce does not consider the growth of the NAS through Next Generation Air Transportation Systems (NextGen) technologies, nor does it take advantage of the skills and abilities of this highly skilled group of employees.

We call on the FAA to hire 200 new fully-trained Technical Operations employees in addition to the specialists FAA is currently hiring; create a workforce plan for Technical Operations; and work with PASS to establish annual attrition and hiring estimates for FY 2024 and beyond.

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