

Safety in the Skies Must Begin With Safety on the Ground: Safety and Security in the Aerospace Related Industries

“There is the threat of one plane crash every week in 2020.” With this headline a German news magazine refers to a statement made by the head of the French Civil Aviation Authority. Checks of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) revealed that some thirty countries do not meet their obligation of monitoring the airlines registered in the countries as required.

Several accidents which have occurred over the past several years demonstrate the need for public attention to this exceedingly important matter. The Industry Steering Committee of the International Metalworkers Federation (IMF) and its working group for Airbus and Boeing met in Toulouse, France on October 20 and 21st, 2005.

During these meetings, three aspects of safety were discussed and considered this important and urgent topic:

1. Unapproved parts / US: Bogus Parts

The massive price war in the aviation industry is increasing pressure on airlines to cut costs of maintenance and repair. The temptation to use “cheap parts” is growing. Investigations have already furnished proof that such “cheap parts,” i.e. spare parts and components which do not meet the manufacturers’ quality standards and as such are not approved by them have been used in a considerable number of aircraft. Such parts were even found in the U.S. President’s “Air Force One.” A few years ago, an entire ring of dealers that had specialized in the sale of uncertified components were rounded up in Italy.

Given the non-observance of copyrights and property rights for which China’s companies in a number of industrial sectors have increasingly been blamed in recent years, it is feared that a growing number of China’s companies will also supply the spare parts market for the aviation industry with copies of certified original components.

2. Major Overhaul and Repair

The report of the ICAO (as well as other entities demonstrates that safety checks are either inadequate, ineffectively performed, or ineffectively monitored in many countries. The report also revealed a number of inadequacies which relate to the myriad of different standards. Uniform and mandatory safety and quality audits are also lacking. National practices are theoretically monitored by ICAO and national enforcement mechanisms, but there is a significant question over the effectiveness of such monitoring.

3. Qualification Requirements for Maintenance Personnel

A growing number of airlines relocate the maintenance and repair of aircraft to low cost countries to take advantage of these countries' lower wages. There is a significant concern regarding the qualification of such maintenance staff in many of these countries and questions have been raised regarding inadequate training and skills – which are comparable to other countries. With the ever increasing technological complexity and growing demands on maintenance staff, concerns over maintenance issues are heightened. Certification, inspection, and monitoring of such repair stations are woefully inadequate.

Trade Union Demands

Participants of the meeting in Toulouse agreed on the following with respect to unapproved or bogus parts:

- Each nation must – establish a system of certification and registration of dealers and suppliers of aircrafts parts and components and oblige airlines and maintenance companies to use only certified parts which have been approved by aircraft manufacturers.
- Establish a procedure to certify new/spare parts which also permit small and medium sized companies to participate.
- Monitor the scraping of aircraft to prevent unapproved parts from being put on the market.
- Implement a secure labeling of approved parts.
- Improve the possibilities of tracking certificates/manufacturers certifications.
- Develop and implement the highest possible safety standards in all aspects of maintenance as well as certification of parts.
- Establish and enhance sanctions against airlines and maintenance companies that violate the highest possible standards.
- Commit countries to monitor maintenance and repair stations to ensure the highest possible standards and that the most skilled workers are being utilized for these purposes.

These principles should be submitted to national/international entities responsible for aerospace and aviation security. The aforementioned principles agreed to by the participants to the above-referenced IMF Aerospace Meeting are construed as being an addition to and complimentary to work performed by other Global Union Federations on these issues.