

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**Federal Aviation Administration****14 CFR Part 39**

[Docket No. 98-NM-29-AD]

RIN 2120-AA64

Airworthiness Directives; Airbus Model A320 Series Airplanes**AGENCY:** Federal Aviation Administration, DOT.**ACTION:** Notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM).

SUMMARY: This document proposes the adoption of a new airworthiness directive (AD) that is applicable to certain Airbus Model A320 series airplanes. This proposal would require repetitive inspections to detect fatigue cracking of the lower surface panel on the wing center box; and repair, if necessary. This proposal also would require modification of the lower surface panel on the wing center box, which constitutes terminating action for the repetitive inspections. This proposal is prompted by issuance of mandatory continuing airworthiness information by a foreign civil airworthiness authority. The actions specified by the proposed AD are intended to prevent fatigue cracking of the lower surface panel on the wing center box, which could result in reduced structural integrity of the airplane.

DATES: Comments must be received by September 25, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Submit comments in triplicate to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Transport Airplane Directorate, ANM-114, Attention: Rules Docket No. 98-NM-29-AD, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055-4056. Comments may be inspected at this location between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

The service information referenced in the proposed rule may be obtained from Airbus Industrie, 1 Rond Point Maurice Bellonte, 31707 Blagnac Cedex, France. This information may be examined at the FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Norman B. Martenson, Manager, International Branch, ANM-116, FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055-4056; telephone (425) 227-2110; fax (425) 227-1149.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Comments Invited**

Interested persons are invited to participate in the making of the proposed rule by submitting such written data, views, or arguments as they may desire. Communications shall identify the Rules Docket number and be submitted in triplicate to the address specified above. All communications received on or before the closing date for comments, specified above, will be considered before taking action on the proposed rule. The proposals contained in this notice may be changed in light of the comments received.

Comments are specifically invited on the overall regulatory, economic, environmental, and energy aspects of the proposed rule. All comments submitted will be available, both before and after the closing date for comments, in the Rules Docket for examination by interested persons. A report summarizing each FAA-public contact concerned with the substance of this proposal will be filed in the Rules Docket.

Commenters wishing the FAA to acknowledge receipt of their comments submitted in response to this notice must submit a self-addressed, stamped postcard on which the following statement is made: "Comments to Docket Number 98-NM-29-AD." The postcard will be date stamped and returned to the commenter.

Availability of NPRMs

Any person may obtain a copy of this NPRM by submitting a request to the FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, ANM-114, Attention: Rules Docket No. 98-NM-29-AD, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055-4056.

Discussion

The Direction Générale de l'Aviation Civile (DGAC), which is the airworthiness authority for France, notified the FAA that an unsafe condition may exist on certain Airbus Model A320 series airplanes. The DGAC advises that, during full-scale fatigue testing on a Model A320 test article, fatigue cracking occurred at 109,217 simulated flights between frames 41 and 42 on the right and left sides of the lower surface panel on the wing center box. Such fatigue cracking, if not corrected, could result in reduced structural integrity of the airplane.

Explanation of Relevant Service Information

Airbus has issued Service Bulletin A320-57-1082, Revision 01, dated December 10, 1997, which describes procedures for performing repetitive high frequency eddy current inspections

to detect fatigue cracking of the lower surface panel on the wing center box; and repair, if necessary.

Accomplishment of the repair would eliminate the need for the repetitive inspections of the repaired area.

In addition, Airbus has issued Service Bulletin A320-57-1043, Revision 2, dated May 14, 1997, which describes procedures for modification of the lower surface panel on the wing center box. The modification involves shot peening of the external side of the lower surface panel near the fuel pump aperture where the thickness changes. Accomplishment of this modification also would eliminate the need for the repetitive inspections described in Airbus Service Bulletin A320-57-1082, Revision 01.

Accomplishment of the actions specified in these service bulletins is intended to adequately address the identified unsafe condition. The DGAC classified Airbus Service Bulletin A320-57-1082, Revision 01, as mandatory and issued French airworthiness directive 97-309-104(B), dated October 22, 1997, in order to assure the continued airworthiness of these airplanes in France.

FAA's Conclusions

This airplane model is manufactured in France and is type certificated for operation in the United States under the provisions of § 21.29 of the Federal Aviation Regulations (14 CFR 21.29) and the applicable bilateral airworthiness agreement. Pursuant to this bilateral airworthiness agreement, the DGAC has kept the FAA informed of the situation described above. The FAA has examined the findings of the DGAC, reviewed all available information, and determined that AD action is necessary for products of this type design that are certificated for operation in the United States.

Explanation of Requirements of Proposed Rule

Since an unsafe condition has been identified that is likely to exist or develop on other airplanes of the same type design registered in the United States, the proposed AD would require accomplishment of the actions specified in the service bulletins, except as discussed below. Accomplishment of the modification of the lower surface panel on the wing center box constitutes terminating action for the repetitive inspections.

Differences Between Proposed Rule and Service Bulletin

Operators should note that, although Airbus Service Bulletin A320-57-1082,

Revision 01, dated December 10, 1997, specifies that the manufacturer may be contacted for disposition of certain repair conditions, this proposal would require the repair of those conditions to be accomplished in accordance with a method approved by either the FAA or the DGAC (or its delegated agent). In light of the type of repair that would be required to address the identified unsafe condition, and in consonance with existing bilateral airworthiness agreements, the FAA has determined that, for this proposed AD, a repair approved by either the FAA or the DGAC would be acceptable for compliance with this proposed AD.

Differences Between Proposed Rule and Foreign AD

Operators should note that, unlike the procedures described in French airworthiness directive 97-309-104(B), dated October 22, 1997, this proposed AD would not permit further flight if fatigue cracks are detected on the lower surface panel of the wing center box. The FAA has determined that, because of the safety implications and consequences associated with such fatigue cracking, any subject lower surface panel that is found to be cracked must be repaired prior to further flight in accordance with a method approved by the FAA or the DGAC (or its delegated agent).

In addition, the proposed AD would differ from the parallel French airworthiness directive in that it would mandate the accomplishment of the terminating action for the repetitive inspections. The French airworthiness directive provides for that action as optional.

Mandating the terminating action is based on the FAA's determination that long-term continued operational safety will be better assured by modifications or design changes to remove the source of the problem, rather than by repetitive inspections. Long-term inspections may not be providing the degree of safety assurance necessary for the transport airplane fleet. This, coupled with a better understanding of the human factors associated with numerous continual inspections, has led the FAA to consider placing less emphasis on inspections and more emphasis on design improvements. The proposed modification requirement is in consonance with these conditions.

Cost Impact

The FAA estimates that 60 airplanes of U.S. registry would be affected by this proposed AD. It would take approximately 2 work hours per airplane to accomplish the proposed

inspection, at an average labor rate of \$60 per work hour. Based on these figures, the cost impact of the inspection proposed by this AD on U.S. operators is estimated to be \$7,200, or \$120 per airplane, per inspection cycle.

It would take approximately 2 work hours per airplane to accomplish the modification, at an average labor rate of \$60 per work hour. There are no parts necessary to accomplish the modification. Based on these figures, the cost impact of the modification proposed by this AD on U.S. operators is estimated to be \$7,200, or \$120 per airplane.

The cost impact figures discussed above are based on assumptions that no operator has yet accomplished any of the proposed requirements of this AD action, and that no operator would accomplish those actions in the future if this AD were not adopted.

Regulatory Impact

The regulations proposed herein would not have substantial direct effects on the States, on the relationship between the national government and the States, or on the distribution of power and responsibilities among the various levels of government. Therefore, in accordance with Executive Order 12612, it is determined that this proposal would not have sufficient federalism implications to warrant the preparation of a Federalism Assessment.

For the reasons discussed above, I certify that this proposed regulation (1) is not a "significant regulatory action" under Executive Order 12866; (2) is not a "significant rule" under the DOT Regulatory Policies and Procedures (44 FR 11034, February 26, 1979); and (3) if promulgated, will not have a significant economic impact, positive or negative, on a substantial number of small entities under the criteria of the Regulatory Flexibility Act. A copy of the draft regulatory evaluation prepared for this action is contained in the Rules Docket. A copy of it may be obtained by contacting the Rules Docket at the location provided under the caption ADDRESSES.

List of Subjects in 14 CFR Part 39

Air transportation, Aircraft, Aviation safety, Safety.

The Proposed Amendment

Accordingly, pursuant to the authority delegated to me by the Administrator, the Federal Aviation Administration proposes to amend part 39 of the Federal Aviation Regulations (14 CFR part 39) as follows:

PART 39—AIRWORTHINESS DIRECTIVES

1. The authority citation for part 39 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 49 U.S.C. 106(g), 40113, 44701.

§ 39.13 [Amended]

2. Section 39.13 is amended by adding the following new airworthiness directive:

Airbus Industrie: Docket 98-NM-29-AD.

Applicability: Model A320 series airplanes on which Airbus Modification 22418 (reference Airbus Service Bulletin A320-57-1043, Revision 2, dated May 14, 1997) has not been accomplished, certificated in any category.

Note 1: This AD applies to each airplane identified in the preceding applicability provision, regardless of whether it has been otherwise modified, altered, or repaired in the area subject to the requirements of this AD. For airplanes that have been modified, altered, or repaired so that the performance of the requirements of this AD is affected, the owner/operator must request approval for an alternative method of compliance in accordance with paragraph (f) of this AD. The request should include an assessment of the effect of the modification, alteration, or repair on the unsafe condition addressed by this AD; and, if the unsafe condition has not been eliminated, the request should include specific proposed actions to address it.

Compliance: Required as indicated, unless accomplished previously.

To prevent fatigue cracking of the lower surface panel on the wing center box, which could result in reduced structural integrity of the airplane, accomplish the following:

(a) Except as provided by paragraph (e) of this AD: Prior to the accumulation of 20,000 total flight cycles, or within 60 days after the effective date of this AD, whichever occurs later, perform a high frequency eddy current inspection to detect fatigue cracking of the lower surface panel on the wing center box, in accordance with Airbus Service Bulletin A320-57-1082, Revision 01, dated December 10, 1997. Repeat the eddy current inspection thereafter at intervals not to exceed 7,500 flight cycles until the actions required by paragraph (c) of this AD are accomplished.

(b) Except as provided by paragraph (d) of this AD: If any cracking is detected during any inspection required by paragraph (a) of this AD, prior to further flight, repair in accordance with Airbus Service Bulletin A320-57-1082, Revision 01, dated December 10, 1997. Accomplishment of the repair constitutes terminating action for the repetitive inspections for the repaired area only.

(c) Prior to the accumulation of 25,000 total flight cycles, or within 60 days after the effective date of this AD, whichever occurs later: Perform a high frequency eddy current inspection to detect fatigue cracking of the lower surface panel on the wing center box, in accordance with Airbus Service Bulletin A320-57-1082, Revision 01, dated December 10, 1997.

(1) If no cracking is detected: Prior to further flight, modify the lower surface panel

on the wing center box, in accordance with Airbus Service Bulletin A320-57-1043, Revision 2, dated May 14, 1997. Accomplishment of the modification constitutes terminating action for the requirements of this AD.

(2) Except as provided by paragraph (d) of this AD, if any cracking is detected: Prior to further flight, repair in accordance with Airbus Service Bulletin A320-57-1082, Revision 01, dated December 10, 1997; and modify any uncracked area in accordance with Airbus Service Bulletin A320-57-1043, Revision 2, dated May 14, 1997. Accomplishment of the repair of cracked area(s) and modification of uncracked area(s) constitutes terminating action for the requirements of this AD.

(d) If any cracking is detected during any inspection required by paragraph (b) or (c)(2) of this AD, and the applicable service bulletin specifies to contact Airbus for an appropriate action: Prior to further flight, repair in accordance with a method approved by either the Manager, International Branch, ANM-116, FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate; or the Direction Générale de l'Aviation Civile (or its delegated agent).

(e) The actions required by paragraph (a) of this AD are not required to be accomplished if the requirements of paragraph (c) of this AD are accomplished at the time specified in paragraph (a) of this AD.

(f) An alternative method of compliance or adjustment of the compliance time that provides an acceptable level of safety may be used if approved by the Manager, International Branch, ANM-116. Operators shall submit their requests through an appropriate FAA Principal Maintenance Inspector, who may add comments and then send it to the Manager, International Branch, ANM-116.

Note 2: Information concerning the existence of approved alternative methods of compliance with this AD, if any, may be obtained from the International Branch, ANM-116.

(g) Special flight permits may be issued in accordance with sections 21.197 and 21.199 of the Federal Aviation Regulations (14 CFR 21.197 and 21.199) to operate the airplane to a location where the requirements of this AD can be accomplished.

Note 3: The subject of this AD is addressed in French airworthiness directive 97-309-104(B), dated October 22, 1997.

Issued in Renton, Washington, on August 19, 1998.

Darrell M. Pederson,

Acting Manager, Transport Airplane Directorate, Aircraft Certification Service.

[FR Doc. 98-22819 Filed 8-25-98; 8:45 am]

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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Aviation Administration

14 CFR Part 39

[Docket No. 98-NM-188-AD]

RIN 2120-AA64

Airworthiness Directives; Saab Model SAAB SF340A and SAAB 340B Series Airplanes

AGENCY: Federal Aviation Administration, DOT.

ACTION: Notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM).

SUMMARY: This document proposes the adoption of a new airworthiness directive (AD) that is applicable to certain Saab Model SAAB SF340A and SAAB 340B series airplanes. This proposal would require a one-time visual inspection of the main landing gear (MLG) brake assemblies to determine the brake configuration, and reconfiguration, if necessary. This proposal is prompted by issuance of mandatory continuing airworthiness information by a foreign civil airworthiness authority. The actions specified by the proposed AD are intended to prevent an incorrect brake combination configuration of the MLG, and consequent reduced controllability of the airplane during take-off and landing.

DATES: Comments must be received by September 25, 1998.

ADDRESSES: Submit comments in triplicate to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Transport Airplane Directorate, ANM-114, Attention: Rules Docket No. 98-NM-188-AD, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055-4056. Comments may be inspected at this location between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

The service information referenced in the proposed rule may be obtained from Saab Aircraft AB, SAAB Aircraft Product Support, S-581.88, Linköping, Sweden. This information may be examined at the FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Norman B. Martenson, Manager, International Branch, ANM-116, FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055-4056; telephone (425) 227-2110; fax (425) 227-1149.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Comments Invited

Interested persons are invited to participate in the making of the proposed rule by submitting such written data, views, or arguments as they may desire. Communications shall identify the Rules Docket number and be submitted in triplicate to the address specified above. All communications received on or before the closing date for comments, specified above, will be considered before taking action on the proposed rule. The proposals contained in this notice may be changed in light of the comments received.

Comments are specifically invited on the overall regulatory, economic, environmental, and energy aspects of the proposed rule. All comments submitted will be available, both before and after the closing date for comments, in the Rules Docket for examination by interested persons. A report summarizing each FAA-public contact concerned with the substance of this proposal will be filed in the Rules Docket.

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Availability of NPRMs

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Discussion

The Luftfartsverket (LFV), which is the airworthiness authority for Sweden, notified the FAA that an unsafe condition may exist on certain Saab Model SAAB SF340A and SAAB 340B series airplanes. The LFV advises that, during testing of improved brakes that were modified in accordance with SAAB Service Bulletin 340-32-113, Revision 1, dated February 9, 1998 (SAAB Modification 2898), the airplane handling was unbalanced, which resulted in degraded brake performance during landing. Investigation revealed that the unbalanced condition was due to the installation of an incorrect combination of main landing gear (MLG) brake assemblies. This condition, if not corrected, could result in reduced controllability of the airplane during take-off and landing.