Boeing Updates Operators on 737 Issues

On January 27, senior executives of all Boeing operators received the following letter from Boeing Commercial Airplane Group's Harry Arnold, executive vice president - Airplane Definition and Development, and Nancy Bethel, executive vice president - Customers.

The text of the letter reads:

As members of the Boeing Commercial Airplane Group's Office of the President, we are writing to address an issue that may have attracted the attention of you, your employees and your passengers: erroneous reports of possible problems with Boeing 737 horizontal stabilizers.

We want to assure you there is no reason to be concerned that loose or missing leading-edge fasteners or an elevator hinge-attachment bolt could compromise the safety and structural integrity of the 737. Further, at this time there are no indications that missing fasteners or bolts caused, or contributed to, the tragic crash of a 737 near Palembang, Indonesia last Dec. 19.

There are several important facts you should know and understand in order to be completely assured about the situation:

First, it is important to note that the airplane involved in the crash received a quarter-"C" check nine days (67 flight hours) prior to the tragedy. At that time, it was noted - and documented - that all of the fasteners were in place;

An examination of the wreckage gives clear evidence that the missing elevator hinge bolt had been installed;

The FAA's inspection order - which resulted in 192 airplanes worldwide being checked - found loose or missing leading-edge fasteners and/or elevator hinge bolts on eight airplanes, none of which was a safety-of-flight issue;

An immediate check of all 737s in production or on the field in Renton and Seattle found no missing or loose fasteners or bolts.

The FAA has completed its audit of the fabrication and installation of 737 horizontal stabilizers. Boeing welcomes this audit as a important step in assuring the quality of our processes, and will be sharing the results with you once they are made public.

The investigation into the cause of the accident in Indonesia continues, with full participation and cooperation from Boeing. As always, we are making the resources of the company available to the investigative authorities; we are committed to helping understand what happened and why.

You should recognize it is quite unusual for Boeing to comment about an ongoing airplane accident investigation, but in this case we believe that the media attention - and subsequent misperception - about the 737 horizontal stabilizer issues are unusual as well. This letter is our means of taking action on behalf of the best interests of you, your employees and your passengers. We welcome your questions and comments.

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