Delta Air Lines First To Sign For New Boeing Support Program

The Boeing Company today announced that Delta Air Lines is the first customer to sign up for a new Boeing product offering aimed at supplying customized replacement floor panels for the commercial airplane aftermarket.

The agreement is expected to generate a requirement from Delta for up to 10,000 replacement floor panels a year. Under the contract, the Boeing plant in Spokane, Wash., will supply panels through June 2003 for all aircraft in the Delta fleet.

The modern Boeing plant in Spokane produces all of the original panels installed on new Boeing airplanes. The plant's advanced computerized systems and numerically controlled cutting equipment minimizes waste while meeting exact specifications.

By introducing new, lean manufacturing processes, the plant recently boosted its output and was able to free up capacity for production of the replacement panels. The panels, about a half inch (1.27 cm) thick, are made of various composite materials. A typical panel is an 11-square-foot (1.02 sq m) rectangle, but shapes and sizes vary.

Airlines routinely replace worn-out panels at specific maintenance intervals. Larger carriers maintain their own stocks of composite sheets and assign crews equipped with hand-operated tools to cut panels from the raw stock and drill holes for fasteners. This work is often not cost-effective, and can be disruptive to other, more highly skilled maintenance requirements. In addition, the raw stock is expensive to inventory.

The Boeing Spokane plant takes advantage of ongoing, large-scale production processes to bring greater efficiency to this aftermarket product and will tailor its support to customer priorities in weight, cost and durability.

"We anticipate Delta will save over $500,000 a year by contracting the manufacture of floor panels with us, rather than doing the work in-house," said Darce Lamb, Boeing Commercial Airplanes Group vice president - Airline Logistics Support. "We're confident the program will attract other large airlines, and that it will become a significant new business that will create value for Boeing."

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