Boeing Rapid Response Center Expands Customer Support

The Boeing Company's new Rapid Response Center has begun full operation, providing commercial airplane operators with quick access to an unprecedented level of support at night, on weekends and during holidays.

Boeing established this comprehensive, one-stop source of information to assist airline customers outside of the company's normal business hours. While the company has always offered around-the-clock support to its customers, this is the first time it has assembled such a broad team of technical experts - equipped with sophisticated databases - in one room. Boeing is the first commercial airplane manufacturer to offer customers a service of this type.

The Rapid Response Center is based at Boeing Customer Services in Seattle, with videoconferencing equipment linking it to a satellite office in Everett, Wash. It is staffed by a dedicated group of technical specialists, including structures engineers, systems engineers, field service representatives, spares personnel and maintenance engineers. It began full operation on July 16, after completing a limited three-month trial run.

The center focuses primarily on airplane-on-ground (AOG) situations - that is, instances when an airplane is unexpectedly removed from service due to a problem with its systems or structure. Most often, this involves a minor technical problem with a back-up system, or minor structural damage. Communication with customers is by telephone and other electronic messaging equipment.

"This is one of the steps we are taking to keep pace with growing customer expectations in an increasingly competitive market," said George Field, vice president - Technical Services, Boeing Commercial Airplanes Group. "When you consider that we serve a fleet of nearly 11,000 airplanes - and 70 percent of our customers are working when we're not at work - it's clear that we have to explore every opportunity for innovation."

At present, the Rapid Response Center's services are limited to the operators of pre-merger Boeing commercial airplanes. Until operators of all Boeing commercial airplanes can be served by the center, calls regarding Douglas models will continue to be supported by the Long Beach Division's 24-hour support desk. The company anticipates extending the center's coverage to Douglas model airplanes in the near future.

Center Director Robert Nova said the teamwork between staff members has been excellent.

"It's really a spirited, team environment, and that makes it a lot of fun," Nova said. "You're helping your customers in real time, one-on-one. And when you're done, they say "thanks."

Nova said the trial period was a great success. During 90 days of limited operation, the center resolved nearly 300 AOG or pending AOG situations involving approximately 150 different airlines. On average, it only took about one hour and 15 minutes to handle each situation. Nova estimates, conservatively, that this quick response in getting airplanes back into the air saved Boeing customers approximately $3 million.

Advancing technology played a big role in making the Rapid Response Center possible, Nova said. Much of the company's technical documentation now is stored digitally, and is immediately available to the center's personnel online. Just a year ago, much of this information was only available on paper.

Nova noted that having a wide range of technical skills available in the Rapid Response Center - along with quick access to data - has greatly reduced the need to call off-duty Boeing engineers and technical experts during the night and on weekends. This, in turn, has made it possible to resolve customer service requests much more rapidly.

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