

Safety officials probing records of work on Southwest jets

November 11 2019, by David Koenig



In this Jan. 25, 2019, file photo a Southwest Airlines jet moves on the runway as a person eats at a terminal restaurant at LaGuardia Airport in New York. Federal regulators have threatened to ground dozens of Southwest Airlines jets if the airline can't confirm that the planes, which it bought used from foreign operators, meet all safety standards. (AP Photo/Julio Cortez, File)

Federal regulators have threatened to ground dozens of Southwest Airlines jets if the airline can't confirm that the planes, which it bought used from foreign operators, meet all safety standards.

The Federal Aviation Administration said Monday it has validated some major repairs to the planes, and it is asking Southwest for more frequent updates until the airline completes documenting maintenance on 38 jets by the end of January.

Southwest said repairs on some used Boeing 737 jets it bought were done but not properly classified by previous owners. Southwest downplayed any risk to safety.

"Our actions did not stem from any suspected safety concerns with the aircraft but were an effort to reconcile and validate records and previous repairs," said a Southwest spokeswoman, Brandy King.

However, the chairman of the House Transportation Committee said recently he was skeptical that all the planes yet to be inspected are airworthy.

Southwest's current problem began with records for 88 planes that it bought from more than a dozen foreign airlines since 2013. According to congressional committees, Southwest hired contractors to review maintenance records and then used authority delegated to it by the FAA to grant certificates that let it carry passengers on the planes.

In May 2018, an FAA inspector discovered discrepancies in some of the records. That prompted a review by Southwest, which turned up 360 major repairs that the airline didn't know about—they were not mentioned by the contractors—according to the Senate Commerce Committee. Some planes were grounded immediately for maintenance, the [committee](#) said Monday.

The FAA then gave Southwest two years—until July 1, 2020—to inspect the planes and verify that all necessary maintenance and repairs had been done properly. On Oct. 29, the FAA manager responsible for overseeing Southwest said the airline had only evaluated 39 planes, a "slow pace."

If Southwest was slow to evaluate the remaining planes, "the FAA may exercise remedies up to and including grounding the aircraft," the FAA manager, John Posey, said in a letter to Southwest's [chief operating officer](#), Mike Van de Ven.

Posey wrote that in reviewing the first 39 planes, Southwest found 30 undocumented repairs and 42 that did not conform to standards. He said FAA understood that Southwest had corrected those situations and all 39 planes met FAA airworthiness standards.

Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., chairman of the House Transportation Committee, called those findings "alarming" and "troubling." He said that given the [record](#) of undocumented repairs on planes that were inspected, he doubted that all the planes yet to be inspected were in airworthy condition. He raised his objections in a letter to FAA Administrator Stephen Dickson.

Southwest agreed to inspect and validate [repair](#) records on the last 38 planes by Jan. 31, five months earlier than the original deadline.

The FAA's concern about the Southwest planes was first reported by The Wall Street Journal.

The planes involved are an earlier model of the Boeing 737 than the 737 Max, which has been grounded since March after two deadly accidents.

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Citation: Safety officials probing records of work on Southwest jets (2019, November 11)
retrieved 25 April 2024 from
<https://techxplore.com/news/2019-11-safety-probing-southwest-jets.html>

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