

Boeing 737 MAX could get EU clearance 'by year's end'

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Boeing-made 737 MAX planes have been standing idle for 18 months

Boeing's troubled 737 MAX airliner, grounded for 18 months after two deadly accidents, could receive certification to fly again in Europe "by the end of the year," the EU's air safety chief said Friday.

The statement signaled a light at the end of the tunnel for Boeing after the lengthy grounding. The Federal Aviation Administration also sent positive signs Friday about the embattled plane, saying the agency's chief planned a test flight next week, further boosting shares.

The two crashes, by Lion Air in October 2018 and Ethiopian Airlines in March 2019, claimed 346 lives and badly dented Boeing's reputation and that of the FAA.

Now "for the first time in a year and a half, I can see we're in sight of the end of the work on the MAX," European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) chief Patrick Ky told reporters in a video press conference.

"We're starting to look at how we can get the MAX back in service by the end of the year."

Early September certification flights by EASA followed June testing by the FAA in June.

But the aircraft must still overcome several hurdles, including in pilot training, before authorities give their green light.

"We continue to follow the lead of global regulators on the process they have laid out for the safe return of the 737 MAX to commercial service," Boeing said in a statement.



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"We appreciate the rigorous scrutiny that the regulatory authorities are rightly applying at every step of their review and they will determine the schedule for return to service."

In Ky's view, even with "just about simultaneous" permission from the EASA and FAA, it will be up to individual nations and airlines to give the go-ahead for 737 MAX flights to resume.

Ky said that renewed certification from China, the first country to ground the aircraft, would "certainly" take a little longer as the Chinese

regulator had yet to envisage resumption of flight tests.

But he added that a training review at London's Gatwick airport to help pilots adapt to new procedures had gone well and that a report evaluating that review would be ready in "two to three weeks."

Boeing board is sued

The FAA, along with EASA and regulators from Canada and Brazil, concluded the joint assessment of Boeing's proposed training earlier this week. The plan will be put out for public comment in the "near future," an FAA spokesman said.

FAA Administrator Steve Dickson and his deputy, Dan Elwell, will undertake the training next week in Seattle. Dickson is also scheduled to undertake a test flight.



Pictures of the victims of Boeing 737 MAX accidents were on display as FAA Stephen Dickson testified in Congress in December 2019

The FAA is reviewing public comments on an airworthiness directive and "will not approve the plane for return to passenger service until it is satisfied that all of the known issues have been adequately," the FAA spokesman said.

A US Congressional report published earlier this month called the earlier crashes "the horrific culmination of a series of faulty technical assumptions by Boeing's engineers, a lack of transparency on the part of Boeing's management, and grossly insufficient oversight by the FAA."

Boeing's board of directors is also under increased scrutiny for its

oversight of the planemaker ahead of the crashes.

Nearly two dozen current and former Boeing officials and board members are named in a recent lawsuit that depicts the board as passive toward operational problems on earlier Boeing models and overly trusting of former chief executive Dennis Muilenburg's explanations for the disasters.

The board, including Muilenburg's successor David Calhoun, ignored "serious safety-related red flags," resulting in an "epochal corporate governance catastrophe," said the suit, which was filed in June in a Delaware court and spotlighted in a Wall Street Journal article on Friday.

Boeing said it will fight the suit, saying it "presents a one-sided and misleading picture" of the company's governance

Shares of Boeing rocketed higher Friday, leading the Dow with 6.8 percent gain to \$156.03.

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