

FAA opens Boeing safety review amid reports of pressure

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Safety inspectors cited incidents of "undue pressure" from Boeing, the FAA said in a letter announcing a new review of the manufacturer.

US air safety regulators will open a review of operations at Boeing after feedback from inspectors assigned to provide oversight for the government showed many feel unable to share their concerns.

The findings have echoes of the issues surrounding the aviation giant's 737 MAX, which suffered two crashes in 2018 and 2019 that claimed 346 lives and led to a 20-month grounding of the aircraft.

In the wake of the tragedies, Boeing and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) came under intense scrutiny from Congress and the public for their close relationship during the airplane manufacturing process that some viewed as undermining safety oversight.

Under an arrangement called Organization Designation Authorization (ODA), safety inspectors are employed by Boeing but are expected to report to the FAA.

"Boeing's company culture appears to hamper members of the ODA unit from communicating openly with the FAA," according to the August 19 letter the agency sent to Boeing, which was obtained by AFP on Wednesday.

In an investigation into the ability to openly express concerns without fear of repercussions, the FAA said it found "35 percent of people voicing concerns and sharing experiences that indicate the environment does not support independence of the ODA unit."

Some of the in-house inspectors cited interference with their work and said the structure created a conflict of interest, pointing to incidents of "undue pressure," and Boeing managers "shopping" for a cooperative inspector, according to the documents.

While the initial survey only involved 32 workers, according to a person familiar with the matter, the FAA letter said the concerns "require an objective review and further fact finding."

The "FAA will conduct an anonymous, independent survey of all Boeing

unit members to identify any remaining concerns."

A Boeing spokesperson told AFP the company has stressed to employees that the ODA unit members "must be accorded the same respect and deference that is shown to our regulator."

"We take these matters with the utmost seriousness, and are continuously working to improve the processes we have in place to ensure the independence" of the inspectors, the official said in a statement.

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