

Boeing urges airlines to check switches after LATAM plane plunge

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The LATAM Airlines Boeing 787 Dreamliner plane that suddenly lost altitude mid-flight, dropping violently and injuring dozens of travellers, is seen on the tarmac of the Auckland International Airport on March 12, 2024.

Boeing on Friday warned airlines flying its 787 Dreamliner model to inspect certain switches in the cockpit, after a New Zealand-bound

LATAM plane dropped violently mid-flight, injuring dozens of travelers.

"The investigation of Flight LA800 is ongoing and we defer to the investigation authorities on any potential findings," a statement from the US aeronautics giant said.

"We have taken the precautionary measure of reminding 787 operators of a service bulletin issued in 2017 which included instructions for inspecting and maintaining switches on flight deck seats," Boeing said, adding, "We are recommending operators perform an inspection at the next maintenance opportunity."

Boeing regularly sends recommendations about its planes to its clients. But this one involved a particularly dangerous incident.

The Chilean airlines LATAM was flying Monday from Sydney, Australia to Auckland, New Zealand, when the plane suddenly plunged earthward, flinging unrestrained passengers out of their seats and smashing some into the cabin roof.

Fifty people were injured, including 13 who were hospitalized.

The airline on Tuesday attributed the accident to an unspecified "technical event."

But the Wall Street Journal, citing US industry sources, said Friday the incident was caused by the clumsiness of a crew member.

It said a [flight attendant](#) inadvertently hit a switch on the pilot's seat while serving a meal, causing a motorized feature to thrust the pilot into the controls and push the plane's nose sharply down.

It said the switch is usually covered and is not meant to be used when the pilot is in the seat.

Contacted in Chile by AFP, LATAM refused to comment, citing the ongoing investigation. "From the beginning we have collaborated with the authorities to clarify this matter," it added.

Boeing also refused to comment.

For its part, the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said it was convening a Corrective Action Review Board (CARB) made up of safety experts to study the matter "and provide feedback to Boeing."

It added, "The process will include reviewing the 2017 service bulletin related to the switches in the pilot seats."

Boeing has suffered a series of safety issues in recent years, including the [fatal crashes](#) of 737 MAX planes in 2018 and 2019 that killed more than 350 people and the near-catastrophic incident in January when a fuselage panel on a Boeing 737 MAX 9 Alaska Airlines jet blew off mid-flight.

Last week, a Boeing 777 jetliner bound for Japan had to make an [emergency landing](#) shortly after takeoff from San Francisco when a wheel fell off and plunged into an airport parking lot, damaging several cars.

US regulators earlier this month gave Boeing 90 days to come up with a plan addressing quality control issues, with the Federal Aviation Administration chief saying the company must "commit to real and profound improvements."

Boeing's share price has dropped 25 percent since the start of the year.

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