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AEI Press Release:

European Aviation Maintenance Standards under threat

Maintaining the highest safety standards in aviation engineering is to be a key focus of a three-day international conference in September. Around 80 aircraft maintenance experts from around the globe affiliated to Aircraft Engineers International (AEI) will meet from 20-23 Sept to discuss and evaluate the threat posed to European Aviation Maintenance during its upcoming International Congress in London.

AEI as the only organisation involved not only with the evolution of regulations but also witness the results first hand on the shop floor. This leaves us well placed to determine the effect these changes have on all European Airlines. Feedback has unfortunately led AEI to come to the preliminary conclusion that at present there is a worrying downward trend as far as standards are concerned. As a result AEI will be increasing its efforts to uncover signs of degradation in Aviation Maintenance standards to ensure the regulatory bodies take appropriate action to protect the both fare paying passengers and those beneath the flight path.

Observations made so far by AEI Affiliated Organisations in almost all European countries are as follows:

1. Airline Pilots (unlicensed and unskilled in Aircraft Maintenance) illegally perform maintenance actions at outstations when the aircraft is grounded due to technical problems. This maintenance is performed because the Airlines have not organised their own local maintenance assistance as required by the regulations. Decisions on whether the aircraft is "GO or No GO" to fly to home base are not based on a thorough investigation by locally available contract Technical Staff but by remote decision from someone thousands of miles away back at home base. This often results in maintenance procedure's being performed by Pilot's not trained to interpret the outcome of these procedure's.
2. Abuse of "Single Event Authorisations" set-up to prevent an aircraft being stranded at an unknown airport after an unforeseen diversion of the flight. This regulation intended to allow for a relaxation of the regulations in exceptional circumstances only has been extended to such an extent that airline operations are using this exemption on a daily basis. This results in a lower "exceptional" standard being applied constantly.
3. Maintenance Part 66 licences in several EU countries have been issued in a manner not compliant with the regulations or to persons not having fulfilled all required

training. Although the process has been clearly described many National Aviation Authorities continue to misinterpret, or misuse the regulations when converting former nationally issued licences or authorisations into the new EU system. AEI has evidence of Personnel not being capable of performing maintenance for which they have been authorised. AEI continues to demand the withdrawal of these licenses (by the responsible national authorities) which unquestionably jeopardize safety but this has been consistently refused by the authorities.

4. During 2006 the EASA standardisation department has uncovered more than 1000 maintenance failings or non adherence/compliance to the regulations by the various European Aviation Authorities. Despite repeated demands to the EU commission (the only organisation empowered to intervene and instigate remedial action) no action has been taken. The audit findings remain open and in fact are increasing as standardisation inspection teams uncover more and more examples. AEI has repeatedly requested that the EU commission publish these irregularities in order to ensure that all EU citizens are well aware of the safety standards employed by any given European Airline before deciding upon with which airline to travel. Despite the safety issues our requests have been ignored and we have not at the time of this release even received a reply explaining why nothing has been done or why our letters remain unanswered.
5. Present proposals to improve Maintenance Regulation's thereby improving standards are bound to fail due to enormous commercial pressure applied by European Airlines and Maintenance Organisations. The continued call from these organisations to make maintenance regulations less restrictive is nothing more than an attempt to reduce maintenance costs. It would appear that many of these organisations are actively attempting to counter improvements by supporting a relaxation of the strict regulations that apply for technical staff. It could be argued that without enforcement powers the European Aviation Safety Agency is susceptible to this economic and political pressure.

The items detailed above will be discussed in full during AEI Congress leading to decisions on how to respond. However AEI cannot force change on its own, we need to engage the assistance of the flying public and politicians to have any chance of countering this trend.

Just recently the EU has on several occasions made news headlines for imposing bans on Non European Airlines considered unsafe to enter into European airspace. The EU has no problem placing these "foreign" airlines on the "Black List" yet fails completely to manage those European airlines under its control by way of EASA.

AEI has a legitimate growing concern about the level of safety in Europe and so declared 2007 the year of the Licensed Aircraft Maintenance Engineer in order to promote awareness of the growing problem of commercialism over safety. AEI considers it their responsibility to inform the flying public about these safety issues, issues which both industry and governments continue to ignore.

Representatives from the EU Commission as well as EASA have been invited to participate in the forum discussion offering them an opportunity to explain their side of the story.

A press conference will be held at the conclusion of congress on Saturday September 22 2007 **15:00 Holiday Inn Hotel, Regents Park**, London, United Kingdom

For further information contact the AEI secretariat at secr-general@airengineers.org or visit our website at www.airengineers.org

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