

Report says U.S. aviation body wants more Boeing 737 electrical data

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Washington, May 7 (RHC)-- Air safety officials in the United States have asked Boeing Co to supply fresh analysis and documentation showing that numerous subsystems in its 737 MAX planes would not be affected by electrical grounding issues first flagged in three areas of the jet in April, two people familiar with the matter have told the Reuters news agency.

The extra analysis injects new uncertainty over the timing of when Boeing's best-selling plane would be cleared to fly by the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) according to the report.

U.S. airlines have said they had expected Boeing to release service bulletins as soon as this week that would have allowed them to make fixes and soon return the planes to service, but this latest issue will likely push that timeline back. "We continue to work closely with the FAA and our customers to address

the ground path issue in affected 737s,” a Boeing spokeswoman said.

Asked about the status of the planes, an FAA spokesman said “we are continuing to work with Boeing.”

The problem, which also halted deliveries of new planes, was then found in two other places on the flight deck, including the storage rack where the affected control unit is kept and the instrument panel facing the pilots.

The glitch is the latest issue to beset the 737 MAX, which was grounded for nearly two years starting in 2019 after two fatal crashes.

The slew of questions over a relatively straightforward electrical issue illustrates the tougher regulatory posture facing the US’s largest exporter as it tries to emerge from the 737 MAX crisis and the overlapping coronavirus pandemic.

Late last week, Boeing submitted service bulletins to the FAA for its approval advising airlines on how to fix the problems with grounding, or the electrical paths designed to maintain safety in the event of a surge of voltage, the two people said.

The FAA approved the service bulletins but then, in ongoing discussions with Boeing, asked for additional analysis over whether other jet subsystems would be affected by the grounding issue, one of the sources said. The FAA will review Boeing’s analysis and any necessary revisions to the service bulletins before they can be sent to airlines.

Boeing has proposed adding a bonding strap or cable that workers screw onto two different surfaces creating a grounding path, two people said. Boeing had initially told airlines a fix could take hours or a few days per jet. The electrical grounding issue emerged after Boeing changed a manufacturing method as it worked to speed up the production of the airliner, a third person said. A fourth person said the change improved a hole-drilling process.

The FAA issued a new airworthiness directive last week requiring a fix before the jets resume flight, saying the issue affects 109 in-service planes worldwide. Sources said it affects more than 300 planes in Boeing’s inventory.

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