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Aviation Group Client Update

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DOT OIG REPORT CRITICIZES FAA'S ABILITY TO ENSURE AIR CARRIER CHECK PILOTS MEET STANDARDS FOR APPROVAL.

On May 31, 2017, the Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General ("OIG") issued an [audit report](#) concluding that the FAA has not ensured all check pilots meet training and observation requirements.

Background. According to the OIG, over 71,000 pilots are employed by U.S. commercial airlines. Of these 71,000, roughly 4,000 are authorized by the FAA as check pilots. Check pilots are pilots who work with air carriers and are authorized to evaluate and ensure pilots have the knowledge, skills, and ability to fly large, passenger aircraft. The FAA has also authorized an additional 600 check pilots as aircrew program designees (APD) to act on behalf of the Agency to certify pilots and oversee check pilots by observing them perform evaluations in flight or in simulators. Check pilots perform the majority of proficiency checks on pilots at air carriers. FAA must evaluate the candidate's qualifications, perform initial observations, and then officially authorize each check pilot.

Purpose. The OIG initiated this audit to assess the effectiveness of FAA's processes for (1) approving air carrier check pilots and APDs, and (2) conducting check pilot and APD oversight.

Findings. The OIG selected a statistical sample of 275 check pilots and 125 APDs. The OIG found that FAA's processes are insufficient to ensure that required training and observations for check pilots and APDs are completed or documented prior to approval. FAA inspectors are required to verify that pilot applicants have completed mandatory training and have been observed in a simulator or in-flight by an FAA inspector before they can be approved as check pilots. However, the audit found that for 40 out of 258 check pilots reviewed, FAA inspectors did not meet these requirements in part because FAA has not effectively trained inspectors on these requirements. The OIG also identified instances where FAA authorized APDs before ensuring that they met requirements.

With regards to FAA's oversight, the audit found the FAA's oversight insufficient to ensure that air carriers meet ongoing check pilot requirements. After being authorized, check pilots must continue to meet recurring training and observation requirements. However, FAA inspectors are not ensuring carriers fulfill these requirements.

Audit results showed 9 check pilots at one carrier did not receive any recurring training in 2015, including 4 that had not received training since 2012 who are still serving as check pilots. Based on this data, the OIG estimated that the percentage of check pilots who did not complete the required training ranged from 6 to 17% annually between years 2011 and 2015 due in part to the FAA's failure to specify, in its guidance or its risk-based oversight tool, that inspectors verify recurrent training requirements.

Recommendations. The OIG recommends that FAA modify periodic training provided to FAA inspectors to include information on the importance of verifying check pilot qualifications prior to approval; clarify inspector guidance on performing and documenting APD training and observations to ensure authorization requirements are fulfilled; and modify internal audit policies to ensure FAA audits provide accurate and thorough assessments of APD oversight at each office.

If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact Shelley Ewalt.

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