



U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Washington, DC 20515

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Chairman

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February 19, 2009

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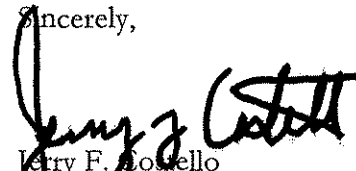
Ms. Nancy LoBue
Acting Assistant Administrator
Aviation Policy, Planning, and Environment
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20591

Dear Ms. LoBue:

On February 11, 2009, the Subcommittee on Aviation held a hearing on the "FAA Reauthorization Act of 2009."

Attached are questions to answer for the record submitted by Rep. Mazie Hirono. I would appreciate receiving your written response to these questions within 14 days so that they may be made a part of the hearing record.

Sincerely,


Jerry F. Costello
Chairman
Subcommittee on Aviation

JFC:pk
Attachment

FEBRUARY 11, 2009
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION
HEARING ON
THE “FAA REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2009”

QUESTION FOR THE RECORD

To:

Ms. NANCY LOBUE
ACTING ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR
AVIATION POLICY, PLANNING, AND ENVIRONMENT
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

I have recently learned that thousands of corporate aircraft, the Secretary of Transportation, the Secretary of Homeland Security, senior military leaders, and the Federal Aviation Administration have technology on its aircraft that enable pilots to see under conditions of unstoppable, blinding smoke in the cockpit.

I was surprised to learn, however, that there is no FAA requirement that passenger airliners or military aircraft have an equivalent system to ensure that pilots can see under these conditions. The technology in question costs approximately \$25,000 to \$30,000 per aircraft – which equates to a penny or so per ticket over the life of the system.

As I understand it, the FAA’s minimum safety standard is that any failure of systems or components that result in catastrophic consequences must be “extremely improbable,” and that “extremely improbable” is defined by the FAA as not one catastrophic event in one billion flight hours.

According to Boeing data, American certified planes have not flown one billion flight hours worldwide in the last 50 years. There have, however, been numerous catastrophic fatal airliner accidents in which smoke in the cockpit has been a cause or a factor during that period.

Like with U.S. Airways Flight 1549, seconds count. Fortunately, in that case the pilot could see to land, even if under very difficult conditions. If the emergency had been continuous, unstoppable smoke in the cockpit and the pilot had been unable to see, it is unlikely we would have had such a happy outcome.

1. Can you tell the committee why the FAA should not mandate emergency vision technology to enable pilots to see to control and land safely during in-flight emergencies with unstoppable blinding smoke in the cockpit?
2. Please provide a list in which smoke in the cockpit was a cause or a factor in the loss of life or damage to any aircraft certified by the FAA or its predecessors.
3. Has the FAA ever required an aircraft manufacturer to certify that pilots can see in the presence of unstoppable, blinding smoke in the cockpit? If not, why not?

In the late 1990s, FAA contracted operations of a number of level 1 airport towers operating under visual flight rules (Class D) to private operators.

One such tower is at Kona International Airport on the island of Hawaii in my district. Kona International Airport is currently classified as a Class D airspace and, therefore, does not have approach control run by the FAA.

Kona International Airport has become increasingly busy over the past 15 years, and it now more than qualifies for Class C status based on the annual count of enplaned passengers: 1.3 million passengers compared with the minimum of 250,000 for a Class C airspace. Class C airspace requires FAA approach control.

Some flight professionals (pilots and air traffic controllers) have expressed concern because of the increasing number of safety alerts related to departures and arrivals at Kona International Airport. It is important to note that Kona is an international airport servicing heavy jets.

4. I want to know if there is a mechanism for contract towers to revert back to FAA control. I have heard that the current contract for Kona International Airport is up in September of this year; therefore, this seems like an opportune time to review the safety needs at this airport.