

DOT OIG Report Highlights Opportunities to Improve FAA Maintenance Oversight



Source: Aeronautical Repair Station Association (ARSA)

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ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA - The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has been too slow in shifting to risk-based oversight of the aviation maintenance industry, a report released today by the Department of Transportation's Office of Inspector General (OIG) found.

The OIG prepared the report titled "FAA Continues to Face Challenges in Implementing a Risk-Based Approach for Repair Station Oversight" at the request of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure's Subcommittee on Aviation. The OIG investigation focused on "(1) determining whether the FAA's oversight includes accurate and timely risk assessment of repair station, and (2) evaluating the effectiveness of the FAA's oversight of foreign and domestic repair stations."

The OIG's most important finding was the FAA has been more focused on mandatory inspections than shifting limited oversight resources to high risk areas. The Aeronautical Repair Station Association (ARSA), which represents aviation maintenance and manufacturing companies, has long echoed concerns expressed in the report and worked with regulators and lawmakers to improve the quality of oversight.

To improve regulation of the aviation maintenance industry, ARSA believes the OIG should ensure the FAA issues regulations in strict accordance with statutes; provides clear, concise guidance material to its workforce and the public; and enforces the regulations uniformly and consistently.

While the report highlights the need to improve the way the FAA does its job, air travelers should rest easy. "Shortcomings at the FAA don't translate into safety deficiencies in the industry," ARSA Executive Vice President Christian A. Klein said. "Regardless of whether or not regulators are looking over their shoulders, our members have an overwhelming business incentive to achieve the highest levels of safety possible."

Although the report never questioned the quality of repair stations' work or raised safety concerns, the OIG cited examples of technical violations of the FAA's policies, suggesting enhanced agency oversight would improve compliance. ARSA is concerned that an investigation intended to examine problems with regulators focuses, though fleetingly, on repair station conduct. "The OIG's explicit role is to audit for the efficient and effective use of agency resources and investigate waste, fraud and abuse," ARSA Executive Director Sarah MacLeod said. "In its auditing role, the OIG should be reviewing the FAA's ability to make, interpret and enforce its rules."

"It's ironic that the OIG questions the methodology of the findings of past FAA inspections yet assumes the validity of its own audits without giving the repair station community a chance to rebut," MacLeod said.

ARSA hopes the report will motivate the FAA to make the changes necessary to improve the quality of its industry oversight. "Our association has long urged the FAA to move to a standardized approach to repair station oversight and target inspections based on risk assessments to use limited resources more efficiently," MacLeod said. "ARSA looks forward to working with Congress and the FAA to address the issues raised in the report, improve the quality of oversight, and achieve our common goal of the safest, most efficient civil aviation system in the world."

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