

Docket No. SA-533

Exhibit No. 7-K

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

WASHINGTON, D.C.

FAA Inspector Interviews

(7 Pages)

CEN09MA142 Section 2

Attachment 2.3 FAA Inspector Interviews



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Kristi Dunks
Air Safety Investigator

Date: February 24, 2009

Person Contacted: John Bianco, Principal Maintenance Inspector

Also Present: Victoria Anderson, Federal Aviation Administration FAA-AAI-100

Subject: CEN09MA142

The principal maintenance inspector (PMI) has been employed by the FAA for 29 years and two months. Prior to the FAA, he worked as a mechanic in the United States Navy, as well as a mechanic for a general aviation operator and Ozark Airlines. His initial employment with the FAA was as an aircraft mechanic with the FAA Flight Inspection Department Overhaul and Modification section in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, for seven years. He then transferred to the FAA's line maintenance facility in Sacramento for 10 years, 3.5 years which were served as a Quality Assurance Specialist. In 1996, he joined the Spokane Flight Standards District Office (FSDO) as a general aviation airworthiness inspector and became the PMI for Empire Airlines in 2000.

The PMI completed ATR-specific training at Flight Safety on October 24, 2003, and Pratt and Whitney engine specific training on July 22, 2004. Empire Airlines is the only company he oversees. As the PMI for Empire Airlines, his work program has been managed through ATOS beginning in October of 2006. The PMI is required to collect and evaluate data to identify areas of high safety risk. At the end of the quarter the PMI analyzes the results in order to develop a surveillance plan. Risk analysis is performed through system safety data collection that is set up based on criticality and levels of priority at specific intervals. This allows for flexibility if other areas require focus. The surveillance includes system attribute inspections (SAI) which involves reviewing the operator's process and procedures, as well as enhanced performance inspections (EPI) which determine if the operator is performing according to those processes. Because Empire Airlines also has 14 CFR Part 135 operations, the Program Tracking and Reporting System (PTRS) is used for that portion of their operation.

The PMI feels that the operator is very cooperative and that they have a mutual respect for each other. He has a good working relationship with the company.

Empire Airlines and Empire Maintenance Repair and Overhaul (MRO) began as the same company but then separated. Because he is not the PMI for the MRO, he does not get involved with the MRO all of the time, although he does conduct EPIs based on their work as an outsource vendor that they perform on Empire Airlines aircraft.

Through ATOS, the PMI visits Empire Airlines approximately 20 percent less than under the PTRS system. In his opinion, through the ATOS process, he is able to develop the in-depth inspection of processes and ATOS has the references readily available and the SAI covers every regulatory item for the inspections. The ATOS does have issues, but they are being worked out in a timely manner.

The PMI works a 40-hour work week and conducts after-hours visits but he has not completed any this year. Line inspections at the other stations are also required. The PMI, Principal Avionics Inspector, and Assistant PMI normally visit line stations and they attempt to visit all line stations at least once per year.

The PMI indicated that Empire Airlines was consistent about submitting self-disclosures, and he was aware but not involved in any current enforcement actions. He did not have any special inspections planned as a result of the accident because he had not been provided any information about the circumstances surrounding the accident. The PMI indicated that Empire Airlines was very responsive to problems that were identified. He would normally send a letter and Empire Airlines would respond promptly, with the problem normally corrected by the end of the quarter.

The PMI was recently issued a total workstation which is a notebook computer that provides access to information that he would need in the field, including email, all documents, and the operator's ATOS plan. He is now able to bring this computer to the field which allows him to spend more time out of the office.

The PMI has concerns about the time available to provide adequate oversight of Empire Airlines because the Assistant PMI is changing employment within the FAA. In addition to his work at the PMI for Empire Airlines, his job also requires work in certification, administration, Part 135 surveillance, and accident investigation.

Note: At the time of this interview, an enforcement had been filed against Empire Airlines for noncompliance with 14 CFR Part 39.7. This enforcement was filed by the PAI of the office and the status of the enforcement was unknown at the time of the interview.



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Kristi Dunks
Air Safety Investigator

Date: February 24, 2009

Person Contacted: Mark E. Durham, Assistant Principal Maintenance Inspector

Also Present: Victoria Anderson, Federal Aviation Administration FAA-AAI-100

Subject: CEN09MA142

The assistant principal maintenance inspector (PMI) has been employed by the FAA since 1990. He has been in aviation maintenance since 1973, which included general and business aviation, serving as Director of Maintenance for a 14 CFR Part 135 operator, serving as an instructor at an aviation maintenance technician school, serving as a service representative for Cessna, and also working at an aircraft conversion company. He holds an Inspector's Authorization and is a certified private pilot although he was not current. The assistant PMI also served as a Designated Mechanic's Examiner.

He began employment with the FAA in 1990 at the Detroit Flight Standards District Office (FSDO) as a General Aviation Maintenance Inspector. In 1991, he was assigned duties with Airborne Express and Kalita. After spending 3.5 years in Detroit, he went to the London International Field Office and conducted certification and surveillance of foreign repair stations, one was British Airways for 3.5 years. He then came to Spokane where he had general aviation responsibilities. For a period he served as the Unit Supervisor/Assistant Manager at the Juneau FSDO and then returned to Spokane in 2001 for personal reasons, and he downgraded back to an inspector position. In 2002, he was assigned as the assistant PMI to Empire Airlines and the Principle Maintenance Inspector to the Maintenance Repair and Overhaul (MRO). Two weeks ago, he was hired by AFS-900 Certification and Surveillance and will be working remotely out of the Spokane FSDO.

The Assistant PMI received ATR-specific training at Flight Safety as well as attended familiarization courses at the operator. As the Assistant PMI for Empire Airlines, his work program has been managed through ATOS beginning in October of 2006. ATOS has airworthiness assignments that are based on a 5-year period. The system includes SAIs and EPIs that are assigned, and additional items are addressed through the use of a CONDOR. The Assistant PMI feels that the ATOS program is good and inspectors are able to provide adequate oversight on their operators.

The PMI feels that the operator is very cooperative and that Empire Airlines does not hide things or conduct business outside of the scope of the regulatory requirements. Empire Airlines and Empire MRO are sister companies. His relationship with the MRO is similar to Empire Airlines.

Empire Airlines headquarters or their stations are visited by the assistant PMI at least once per week. Approximately 18-24 percent of the visits are after hours. All of the line stations are usually visited at least twice per year

The Assistant PMI works a 40-hour work week and conducts after-hours visits. He described his workload as adequate, although he is spending less time in the field due to the more cumbersome reporting requirements.

The Assistant PMI indicated that Empire Airlines was consistent about submitting self-disclosures. Currently, there is an active enforcement against Empire due to their missing compliance with an airworthiness directive when the airplane was delivered from Europe. Empire called the FSDO and reported the problem.

Recently, an audit was conducted on the MRO which involved five FSDO inspectors unrelated to the MRO. The inspectors were given assignments and found the following problems: missing sign-offs at the turnover station, eyewash station not located at appropriate place, and unserviceable parts were identified in the parts room. The MRO has recently grown from 20-30 mechanics to 80-90 mechanics. He did not have any special inspections planned as a result of the accident because he had not been provided specific information about the circumstances surrounding the accident.



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Kristi Dunks
Air Safety Investigator

Date: February 24, 2009

Person Contacted: Eric Barr, Principal Avionics Inspector

Also Present: Victoria Anderson, Federal Aviation Administration FAA-AAI-100

Subject: CEN09MA142

The principal avionics inspector (PAI) has been employed by the FAA since 2002. He began with the Las Vegas, Nevada, Flight Standards District Office as an avionics inspector, and then moved to Spokane, Washington, in 2007 as a geographic maintenance inspector. On March 2, 2008, he took over the duties of PAI for Empire Airlines.

He has been in the aviation industry for 20 years and began as an aviation maintenance technician when he was 20 years old. He is originally from Spokane and worked at a local fixed based operator, and then worked for Empire Airlines from 1989 to 2001. Over this time period he took one year off to obtain flight training. The PAI also holds a commercial pilot certificate, as well as a certified flight instructor (CFI) certificate with a CFI-instrument rating. He did commercial flying in Alaska as a pilot-mechanic. He does not hold an inspector's authorization (IA). In 2001, he spent a year contracting maintenance across the United States.

The PAI serves as the PAI for Empire Airlines as well as the repair station. He received formal ATR training at Flight Safety about six months ago. In addition to his work with Empire, he also oversees a small 14 CFR Part 91 operator.

In order to perform his job functions, the PAI uses the ATOS business model for Empire Airlines and the Maintenance Repair and Overhaul (MRO) falls under the Program Tracking and Reporting System (PTRS). Recently because the MRO had grown so much, the FAA felt that it would be worthwhile to have a second set of eyes to look at the operator. The inspection did not reveal any regulatory issues, although some best practices issues were identified. The issues were conveyed in a letter and the operator has corrected some issues and is actively working on the others.

The PAI feels that the ATOS program provides him the tools to do his work properly. The work program is more adaptable to operators and provides more flexibility in the

oversight program. The PAI indicated that the ATOS process works if it is used appropriately. He further indicated that the work station recently implemented has been very beneficial in performing his job duties.

The PAI indicated that Empire Airlines and the FAA have a good relationship. Empire Airlines is very compliant with the problems identified. There are currently two active enforcements. One involved an airworthiness directive (AD) issue for Empire Airlines and the other involved Part 43 and Part 145 violations for the MRO. A letter of investigation was also initiated for the repair station.

The PAI works a 40-hour week and visits Empire several times per week with some required after-hours visits. Approximately 30 percent of his time is spent out of the office, with 70 percent in the office. Many of the required element performance inspections (EPIs) have to be conducted off-hours. All of the line stations are visited annually. The FAA recently issued inspectors a total workstation that has all of the necessary information to perform inspections. This has allowed the PAI to spend more time in the field.

The most recent corrective actions have involved getting Empire compliant with ATOS. Many of the areas are due to the fact that Empire was certified over 25 years ago and changes have occurred in the requirements. The most recent letter was issued in January of 2009. Normally, the PMI, PAI, and assistant PMI send a letter to the maintenance group every quarter to address identified issues.

The PAI feels that due to the recent growth of the MRO, the PAI duties should be separated between Empire Airlines and the MRO. He is working with management on assigning the repair station to another PAI.