

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-142T](#), a testimony before the Aviation Subcommittee, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Among the agency's responsibilities for aviation safety, FAA issues certificates for new aircraft and parts and grants approvals for changes to air operations and aircraft. In 2010, GAO made recommendations to improve FAA's certification and approval processes. Subsequently, the Act required FAA to work with industry to assess the certification process and address some of the findings in GAO's report. In July 2013, FAA issued reports on its efforts, including those in response to committee recommendations and FAA's implementation plans. This testimony addresses FAA's responses to the recommendations made by GAO in 2010 and the two joint FAA-industry committees concerning (1) the certification and approval processes and (2) the consistency of regulatory interpretation. It also discusses future challenges facing FAA's certification and approval processes.

This statement is based in part on GAO's 2010 report. More detailed information on the objectives, scope, and methodology for that work can be found in that report. In addition, for this statement, GAO interviewed industry representatives, reviewed the methodologies used to develop the committees' recommendations, and assessed the recommendations and FAA's planned responses to those recommendations in terms of whether they were relevant, clear, actionable, and feasible.

GAO is not making any new recommendations in this testimony.

View [GAO-14-142T](#). For more information, contact Gerald L. Dillingham, Ph.D. at (202) 512-2834 or dillinghamg@gao.gov.

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AVIATION SAFETY

Status of Recommendations to Improve FAA's Certification and Approval Processes

What GAO Found

In 2010, GAO reported that industry stakeholders and experts believed that the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) certification and approval processes contribute positively to the safety of the national airspace system. However, stakeholders and experts also noted that negative certification and approval experiences—such as duplication of approvals—although infrequent, can result in delays that industry says are costly. GAO made two recommendations requiring, among other things, that FAA develop a continuous evaluative process and a method to track submission approvals. FAA addressed one recommendation and partially addressed the other. An FAA-industry committee established in response to the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 (the Act) made six recommendations to improve the certification and approval processes, including establishing a performance measurement process. In response to recommendations from the certification process committee, FAA developed an implementation plan with 14 initiatives, but the initiatives do not contain some elements essential to a performance measurement process, such as performance measures. Without performance measures, FAA will be unable to evaluate current and future programs.

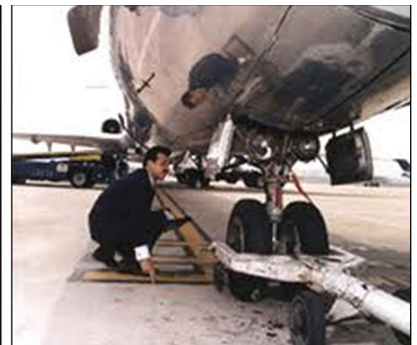
GAO also reported in 2010 that variation in FAA's interpretation of standards for certification and approval decisions is a long-standing problem. A second FAA-industry committee, established in response to the Act, made recommendations concerning the consistency of regulatory interpretation. FAA reported that it is determining the feasibility of implementing the recommendations and expected to develop an action plan by December 2013. Further, FAA reported it would measure implementation, but not outcomes; measuring outcomes helps to understand if the action is having the intended effect.

Among the challenges facing FAA, its certification and approval workload is expected to grow due to the introduction of new technologies and materials and expected progress in the deployment of the Next Generation Air Transportation System. Having efficient and consistent certification and approval processes would allow FAA to better use its resources to meet these increasing workload demands and better ensure aviation safety in an era of limited resources.

FAA Conducts Inspections as Part of Certification



Source: How Stuff Works.



Source: FAA.