

airplanes, that currently requires repetitive inspections to detect cracking of the upper radius of the forward fitting of frame 47, and repair if necessary. This amendment retains those requirements but shortens the initial compliance time and the repetitive inspection intervals. This amendment also expands the applicability to include additional airplanes. This amendment is prompted by issuance of mandatory continuing airworthiness information by a civil airworthiness authority. The actions specified by this AD are intended to detect and correct such fatigue cracking, which could result in propagation of the cracking to the rear fitting and reduced structural integrity of fuselage frame 47.

DATES: Effective May 1, 2003.

The incorporation by reference of Airbus Service Bulletins A300-53-6029, Revision 05, including Appendix 01, and A300-53-0246, Revision 03, including Appendix 03, both dated April 11, 2001, as listed in the regulations, is approved by the Director of the Federal Register as of May 1, 2003.

The incorporation by reference of Airbus Service Bulletin A300-53-6029, Revision 02, dated November 7, 1994, as listed in the regulations, was approved previously by the Director of the Federal Register as of October 16, 1996 (61 FR 47808, September 11, 1996).

ADDRESSES: The service information referenced in this AD may be obtained from Jacques Leborgne, Airbus Industrie Customer Service Directorate, 1 Rond Point Maurice Bellonte, 31707 Blagnac Cedex, France. This information may be examined at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Transport Airplane Directorate, Rules Docket, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington; or at the Office of the Federal Register, 800 North Capitol Street, NW., suite 700, Washington, DC.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dan Rodina, Aerospace Engineer, International Branch, ANM-116, FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055-4056; telephone (425) 227-2125; fax (425) 227-1149.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: A proposal to amend part 39 of the Federal Aviation Regulations (14 CFR part 39) by superseding AD 96-18-18, amendment 39-9744 (61 FR 47808, September 11, 1996), which is applicable to all Airbus Model A300 B4-600, B4-600R, and F4-600R (collectively called A300-600) series airplanes, was published in the **Federal Register** on June 11, 2002 (67 FR 39900). That action proposed to retain the

requirements of the existing AD but shorten the initial compliance time and repetitive inspection intervals. That action also proposed to expand the applicability to include additional airplanes.

Comments

Interested persons have been afforded an opportunity to participate in the making of this amendment. Due consideration has been given to the comments received.

Support for the Proposed AD

The commenters generally support the proposed AD, with the following recommended changes.

Request To Revise Compliance Time of Paragraph (b)(1)

Several commenters request that the compliance time of paragraph (b)(1) (applicable to Model A300-600 series airplanes) of the proposed AD be revised. The commenters state that the proposed wording would effect a compliance time more restrictive than that mandated in the corresponding French airworthiness directive. The commenters add that such a compliance time would penalize airlines for inspections done in compliance with the new proposed requirements that were accomplished before the effective date of the AD by requiring reinspection in 60 days.

Paragraph (b)(1) of the proposed AD is incorrect. The FAA had intended to match the compliance time of AD 96-18-18 with that mandated by the parallel French airworthiness directive 2001-355(B), dated August 8, 2001. Therefore, the compliance time in paragraph (b)(1) of this final rule has been revised to 6,100 flight cycles, with a grace period of 750 flight cycles/1,900 flight hours (whichever occurs first). This change does not result in a more restrictive inspection schedule than that of the proposed AD, and consequently does not impose an additional burden on any operator.

Request To Allow Flight With Cracks

Several commenters request that paragraphs (c) and (d) of the proposed AD be revised to allow temporary continued flight with cracks under certain conditions found during inspection. The commenters state that such a provision would provide the FAA with data to monitor airplanes with cracks and still allow a level of safety equivalent to that of the proposed AD. One commenter describes an inspection schedule based on crack length, agreed to by the FAA and the manufacturer.

The FAA partially agrees, but does not concur with the request to allow flight with known cracking in a major frame in a primary structure. The FAA finds it necessary to evaluate each crack finding on a case-by-case basis, and to require repair procedures or repetitive inspections based on that evaluation. The FAA may consider allowing flight with known cracks as an alternative method of compliance (AMOC), based on the configuration of the cracks and the operator's ability to safely monitor the cracks by inspection until a repair can be implemented. Given the expertise required to adequately monitor cracking conditions in a manner that ensures the safety of the public, the FAA would consider such a provision only as an AMOC. No change to the final rule is necessary regarding this issue. However, after operators' inspection findings have been validated, the FAA may consider issuing an AMOC with general applicability to all affected airplanes, provided Airbus can specify a comprehensive crack-monitoring program that reduces the need for direct FAA engineering involvement in individual crack-monitoring programs.

Request To Extend Compliance Time of Paragraph (a)(2)(ii)

Two commenters request that paragraph (a)(2)(ii) of the proposed AD be revised to reflect a compliance time of "750 flight cycles or 1,500 flight hours, whichever occurs first." According to the commenters, the proposed 60-day grace period would result in economic hardship to operators. The commenters request the same grace period as that for Model A300 B2 and B4 series airplanes.

The FAA agrees. The grace period, inadvertently written in paragraph (a)(2)(ii) in the proposed AD as 60 days, has been revised in this final rule to 750 flight cycles/1,900 flight hours (whichever occurs first).

Request To Coordinate Compliance Times of Related ADs

Two commenters request that the proposed AD be revised to consider the effects of existing ADs that involve work in the same area. The commenters refer to three related ADs: AD 95-24-04, amendment 39-9436 (60 FR 58213, November 27, 1995); AD 97-16-06, amendment 39-10097 (62 FR 41257, August 1, 1997), as corrected (62 FR 44888, August 25, 1997); and AD 2002-11-04, amendment 39-12765 (67 FR 38193, June 3, 2002). The commenters propose a harmonized inspection threshold to take advantage of access,