

SUMMARY: This amendment adopts a new airworthiness directive (AD), applicable to certain Boeing Model 747-400 and -400D series airplanes, that requires repetitive inspections to detect discrepancies of the drip shield and supports located above the rudder pedal mechanisms; corrective action, if necessary; and eventual modification of the drip shield, which would terminate the repetitive inspections. The actions specified by this AD are intended to prevent unrestrained drip shields from interfering with the rudder pedal mechanism, which could result in reduced controllability of the airplane. This action is intended to address the identified unsafe condition.

DATES: Effective February 18, 2003.

The incorporation by reference of certain publications listed in the regulations is approved by the Director of the Federal Register as of February 18, 2003.

ADDRESSES: The service information referenced in this AD may be obtained from Boeing Commercial Airplane Group, P.O. Box 3707, Seattle, Washington 98124-2207. 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: Clint Jones, Aerospace Engineer, Systems and Equipment Branch, ANM-130S, FAA, Seattle Aircraft Certification Office, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055-4056; telephone (425) 227-1622; fax (425) 227-1181.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: A proposal to amend part 39 of the Federal Aviation Regulations (14 CFR part 39) to include an airworthiness directive (AD) that is applicable to certain Boeing Model 747-400 series airplanes was published in the **Federal Register** on June 28, 2002 (67 FR 43570). That action proposed to require repetitive inspections to detect discrepancies of the drip shield and supports located above the rudder pedal mechanisms; corrective action, if necessary; and eventual modification of the drip shield, which would terminate the repetitive inspections.

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. One commenter concurs with the proposed AD.

Request To Clarify Applicability

One commenter asks that the applicability in the proposed AD be clarified. The commenter suggests adding Model 747-400 series airplanes certificated in the "passenger" category, in lieu of "any" category, to the applicability section. The commenter states that the drip shields referenced in the proposed AD are not installed on Model 747-400F (freighter) series airplanes.

We agree with the commenter that the applicability should be clarified; however, not in the manner proposed. Per the 747 Type Certificate Data Sheet, which specifies Model 747-400, -400D, and -400F series airplanes, we have clarified the applicability throughout this final rule to specify Model 747-400 and -400D series airplanes only.

Request To Extend Repetitive Inspection Interval

One commenter reiterates the statement in the differences section of the proposed AD that specifies the repetitive inspection interval for the "C-check" as every 3,000 flight hours. The commenter asks that an interval of 6,000 flight hours or 18 months be allowed as a substitute for the "C-check" recommended in the referenced service bulletin, in that it is a more appropriate interval, and appropriately limits both long- and short-haul airplanes. The commenter notes that the Boeing 747-400 Maintenance Planning Document recommends 6,000 flight hours or 18 months as the "C-check" interval, and recent data indicate that the average inspection interval for the fleet is 5,750 flight hours. The commenter adds that imposing an interval of 3,000 flight hours would force some operators to conduct twice as many inspections with less time and manpower available, with no apparent improvement in airplane safety.

We agree with the commenter. Substantiating data were submitted indicating that an extension of the repetitive inspection interval to 6,000 flight hours or 18 months, whichever is first, provides an acceptable level of safety. We find that such an extension in the repetitive inspection interval will allow the inspections to be completed during regularly scheduled maintenance visits. Paragraphs (a)(1) and (a)(2) of this final rule have been changed accordingly.

Request To Change Certain Wording

One commenter suggests that certain wording specified in Figure 2 of the Accomplishment Instructions of the referenced service bulletin be changed.

The note in Figure 2 states, "Plate clips found dis-bonded from the dripshield should be re-installed with rivets." The commenter asks that the word "should" be changed to "must." The commenter does not give a reason for the request.

We do not agree with the commenter. Although the note in Figure 2 of the Accomplishment Instructions of the referenced service bulletin does not definitively specify that discrepant plate clips must be reinstalled with rivets, paragraph (c) of this AD mandates the requirements for installing the rivets. No change to the final rule is necessary in this regard.

Change to Final Rule

Because the language in Note 3 of the proposed AD is regulatory in nature, that note has been redesignated as paragraph (b) of this final rule. Subsequent paragraphs have been reordered accordingly.

Explanation of Editorial Change

We have changed the service bulletin citation throughout this final rule to exclude the Evaluation Form. (The form is intended to be completed by operators and submitted to the manufacturer to provide input on the quality of the service bulletin; however, this AD does not include such a requirement.)

Conclusion

After careful review of the available data, including the comments noted above, the FAA has determined that air safety and the public interest require the adoption of the rule with the changes previously described. The FAA has determined that these changes will neither increase the economic burden on any operator nor increase the scope of the AD.

Cost Impact

There are approximately 498 airplanes of the affected design in the worldwide fleet. The FAA estimates that 60 airplanes of U.S. registry will be affected by this AD.

It will take approximately 1 work hour per airplane to accomplish the inspection, at an average labor rate of \$60 per work hour. Based on these figures, the cost impact of the required inspection on U.S. operators is estimated to be \$3,600, or \$60 per airplane, per inspection cycle.

It will take approximately 3 work hours per airplane to accomplish the terminating action, at an average labor rate of \$60 per work hour. The cost of required parts will be minimal. Based on these figures, the cost impact of the required terminating action on U.S.