

### Special Flight Permits

(d) Special flight permits may be issued in accordance with sections 21.197 and 21.199 of the Federal Aviation Regulations (14 CFR 21.197 and 21.199) to operate the airplane to a location where the requirements of this AD can be accomplished.

### Incorporation by Reference

(e) The actions shall be done in accordance with McDonnell Douglas Alert Service Bulletin MD90-24A051, Revision 02, excluding Evaluation Form, dated August 14, 2002. This incorporation by reference was approved by the Director of the Federal Register in accordance with 5 U.S.C. 552(a) and 1 CFR part 51. Copies may be obtained from Boeing Commercial Aircraft Group, Long Beach Division, 3855 Lakewood Boulevard, Long Beach, California 90846, Attention: Data and Service Management, Dept. C1-L5A (D800-0024). Copies may be inspected at the FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington; or at the FAA, Los Angeles Aircraft Certification Office, 3960 Paramount Boulevard, Lakewood, California; or at the Office of the Federal Register, 800 North Capitol Street, NW., Suite 700, Washington, DC.

### Effective Date

(f) This amendment becomes effective on May 30, 2003.

Issued in Renton, Washington, on April 18, 2003.

**Michael J. Kaszycki,**

*Acting Manager, Transport Airplane Directorate, Aircraft Certification Service.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

### Federal Aviation Administration

#### 14 CFR Part 39

[Docket No. 2002-NM-329-AD; Amendment 39-13128; AD 2003-08-15]

**RIN 2120-AA64**

### Airworthiness Directives; Boeing Model 737-200, -200C, -300, -400, and -500 Series Airplanes

**AGENCY:** Federal Aviation Administration, DOT.

**ACTION:** Final rule; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** This amendment adopts a new airworthiness directive (AD) that is applicable to certain Boeing Model 737-200, -200C, -300, -400, and -500 series airplanes. This action requires a one-time mid-frequency eddy current (MFEC), a low-frequency eddy current (LFEC), and a detailed inspection for damage or cracking of stringer S-4L and S-4R lap joints and stringer clips

between body station (BS) 540 and BS 727, and follow-on inspections and repair if necessary. This action is necessary to find and fix cracking of the fuselage lap joints, which could result in sudden decompression of the airplane.

**DATES:** Effective May 12, 2003.

The incorporation by reference of Boeing Alert Service Bulletin 737-53A1255, dated October 17, 2002, as listed in the regulations, is approved by the Director of the Federal Register as of May 12, 2003.

The incorporation by reference of Boeing Service Bulletin 737-53A1177, Revision 6, dated May 31, 2001, as listed in the regulations, was approved previously by the Director of the Federal Register as of May 17, 2002 (67 FR 17917, April 12, 2002).

Comments for inclusion in the Rules Docket must be received on or before June 24, 2003.

**ADDRESSES:** Submit comments in triplicate to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Transport Airplane Directorate, ANM-114, Attention: Rules Docket No. 2002-NM-329-AD, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055-4056. Comments may be inspected at this location between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays. Comments may be submitted via fax to (425) 227-1232. Comments may also be sent via the Internet using the following address: [9-anm-iarccomment@faa.gov](mailto:9-anm-iarccomment@faa.gov). Comments sent via fax or the Internet must contain "Docket No. 2002-NM-329-AD" in the subject line and need not be submitted in triplicate. Comments sent via the Internet as attached electronic files must be formatted in Microsoft Word 97 for Windows or ASCII text.

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 FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, 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:** Duong Tran, Aerospace Engineer, Airframe Branch, ANM-120S, FAA, Seattle Aircraft Certification Office, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055-4056; telephone (425) 917-6452; fax (425) 917-6590.

### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

#### Related AD

On April 2, 2002, the FAA issued AD 2002-07-08, amendment 39-12702 (67

FR 17917, April 12, 2002), applicable to certain Boeing Model 737 series airplanes. That AD specifies Boeing Service Bulletin (SB) 737-53A1177, Revision 6, dated May 31, 2001, as an appropriate source of service information for that AD. That AD requires repetitive inspections to find cracking of the lower skin at the lower row of fasteners in the lap joints of the fuselage, and repair of any cracking found. That AD also requires modification of the fuselage lap joints at certain locations, which constitutes terminating action for certain repetitive inspections of the modified areas. Additionally, that AD requires repetitive inspections and requires replacement of a certain preventive modification with an improved modification. That AD was prompted by our determination that, in light of crack findings, certain modifications of the fuselage lap joints do not provide an adequate level of safety. The actions specified by that AD are intended to find and fix cracking of the fuselage lap joints, which could result in sudden decompression of the airplane.

### Since the Issuance of That AD

We have received a report indicating that, during a walk-around inspection on a Model 737-200 series airplane with 60,333 total flight cycles, a 23-inch-long crack was found in the lower row of the stringer S-4L lap joint between body station (BS) 616 and BS 639. The crack was noticed above the over-wing exit because the lower skin was pushed outward approximately 1 inch with the crack ends turning downward at the tear straps. The flight crew did not report any pressurization problems, and the passengers and cabin crew did not report any abnormal noise in that area. Further external and internal non-destructive testing methods for cracking of the lap joint revealed additional cracking. The possible extent of cracking both forward and aft of the 23-inch-long cracked section is a concern. Cracks were found in between the tear straps and in the skin locations common to the tear straps. The intact tear straps were able to turn the cracks as they were designed to do; however, due to the condition of the skin at the tear straps forward and aft of the 23-inch crack area, it is likely that similar crack link-up just forward in an area that had a higher percentage of cracked fastener holes could have resulted in an uncontained decompression. Of particular concern is the total number and length of cracks found at that particular lap joint. The damage found apparently exceeds all prior in-service crack findings and also exceeds the