

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**Federal Aviation Administration****14 CFR Part 39**

[Docket No. 2003–SW–20–AD; Amendment 39–13181; AD 2003–08–53]

RIN 2120–AA64

Airworthiness Directives; Eurocopter France Model SA–365N1, AS365–N2, AS 365 N3, and SA–366G1 Helicopters

AGENCY: Federal Aviation Administration, DOT.

ACTION: Final rule; request for comments.

SUMMARY: This document publishes in the **Federal Register** an amendment adopting a superseding Airworthiness Directive (AD) 2003–08–53, sent previously to all known U.S. owners and operators of the specified Eurocopter France (Eurocopter) model helicopters by individual letters. This AD requires, in addition to the checks and tapping test inspections required in the existing AD, adding the Eurocopter Model AS 365 N3 to the applicability and correcting tail rotor blade (blade) part numbers. Also, this AD requires doing tapping tests for bonding separation on blades and removing certain blades at specified intervals. The actions specified by this AD are intended to prevent failure of a blade, loss of tail rotor control, and subsequent loss of control of the helicopter.

DATES: Effective June 20, 2003, to all persons except those persons to whom it was made immediately effective by Emergency AD 2003–08–53, issued on April 23, 2003, which contained the requirements of this amendment.

Comments for inclusion in the Rules Docket must be received on or before August 4, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Submit comments in triplicate to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Office of the Regional Counsel, Southwest Region, Attention: Rules Docket No. 2003–SW–20–AD, 2601 Meacham Blvd., Room 663, Fort Worth, Texas 76137. You may also send comments electronically to the Rules Docket at the following address: 9-asw-adcomments@faa.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Gary Roach, Aviation Safety Engineer, FAA, Rotorcraft Directorate, Regulations Group, Fort Worth, Texas 76193–0111, telephone (817) 222–5130, fax (817) 222–5961.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: On May 9, 2000, the FAA issued AD 2000–10–08, Amendment No. 39–11732 (65 FR 31256, May 17, 2000), to require

inspecting each blade for bonding separation, measuring the clearance between the tip of each blade and the circumference of the air duct, and replacing a blade if necessary. After issuing that AD, based on further analysis, we determined that a pilot should be able to check for a cracked, blistered, or wrinkled blade and that some debonding of the blade is acceptable and issued AD No. 2000–10–08R1 on September 25, 2001 (66 FR 50307, October 3, 2001), which amended AD No. 2000–10–08.

On April 23, 2003, we issued Emergency AD 2003–08–53 for the specified model helicopters, which requires, in addition to the checks and tapping test inspections required in the existing AD, adding the Eurocopter Model AS 365 N3 to the applicability, correcting blade part numbers, additional tapping tests for bonding separation on blades at specified intervals, and removing certain blades at specified intervals. That action was prompted by reports of an incident involving failure of the blade and an in-flight failure of a blade due to a fatigue crack. This condition, if not corrected, could result in failure of a blade, loss of tail rotor control, and subsequent loss of control of the helicopter.

The FAA has reviewed Edition No. 1, Revision No. 0, of Eurocopter Alert Service Bulletin No. 05.09 for Model SA366G1 helicopters and No. 05.00.17 for Model AS 365 N1 and N2 helicopters, both dated April 16, 2003, which describe procedures for blade monitoring and limitations.

The Direction Generale De L'Aviation Civile (DGAC), the airworthiness authority for France, notified the FAA that an unsafe condition may exist on these helicopter models. The DGAC advises that fatigue failure of the Kevlar tie bar of a blade and loss of the anti-torque function led to an accident. The DGAC classified the alert service bulletins as mandatory and issued AD Nos. T2003–155(A) for Eurocopter Model AS 365 N helicopters and T2003–156(A) for Eurocopter Model SA 366 helicopters, both dated April 17, 2003, to ensure the continued airworthiness of these helicopters in France.

These helicopter models are manufactured in France and are type certificated for operation in the United States under the provisions of 14 CFR 21.29 and the applicable bilateral agreement. Pursuant to the applicable bilateral agreement, the DGAC has kept the FAA informed of the situation described above. The FAA has examined the findings of the DGAC, reviewed all available information, and

determined that AD action is necessary for products of these type designs that are certificated for operation in the United States.

Since the previously described unsafe condition is likely to exist or develop on other Eurocopter model helicopters of these same type designs, the FAA issued Emergency AD 2003–08–53 to prevent failure of a blade, loss of tail rotor control, and subsequent loss of control of the helicopter. Therefore, in addition to the checks and tapping test inspections required in AD 2000–10–08R1, this AD requires the following:

- Add the Eurocopter Model AS 365 N3 to the applicability.
- Correct blade, P/N 365A12–0020–all dash numbers, to P/N 365A12–0020–00, –01, –02, or –03.
- At intervals not to exceed 25 hours time-in-service (TIS), do tapping tests for bonding separation on blades.
- Within 10 hours TIS, remove blades with 150 or more hours TIS.
- On or before 160 hours TIS, remove blades with less than 150 hours TIS.

This AD revises the Airworthiness Limitations section of the maintenance manual by establishing a 160-hour TIS life limit for blades, P/N 365A12–0020–02 and 365A12–0020–03, with a serial number (S/N) equal to or greater than 32944, except for S/N 32963 through 33091, S/N 33116 through 33187, and S/N 33232 through 33319.

The short compliance time involved is required because the previously described critical unsafe condition can adversely affect the controllability or structural integrity of the helicopter. Therefore, adding the Eurocopter Model AS 365 N3 to the applicability; correcting the blade part numbers; conducting tapping tests at intervals not to exceed 25 hours TIS; within 10 hours TIS, removing blades with 150 or more hours TIS; and on or before 160 hours TIS, removing blades with less than 150 hours TIS are required, and this AD must be issued immediately.

An owner/operator (pilot) may perform the visual checks for a crack, blister, or wrinkle in the blade. Pilots may perform these checks because they require no tools and can be accomplished by observation and may be performed equally well by a pilot or a mechanic. However, the pilot must enter compliance with those requirements into the helicopter maintenance records in accordance with 14 CFR 43.11 and 91.417(a)(2)(v).

Since it was found that immediate corrective action was required, notice and opportunity for prior public comment thereon were impracticable and contrary to the public interest, and good cause existed to make the AD