

emergency escape slides; a one-time inspection for correct adjustment of the slide release mechanism and the girt bar attachment fittings, which would terminate the repetitive inspections; a one-time test for correct extension of the girt bar through the sliders; and corrective action, if necessary. The actions specified by this AD are intended to prevent failure of an emergency escape slide, which could result in a delayed evacuation in an emergency and consequent injury to passengers or crew. This action is intended to address the identified unsafe condition.

DATES: Effective August 14, 2003.

The incorporation by reference of certain publications listed in the regulations is approved by the Director of the Federal Register as of August 14, 2003.

ADDRESSES: The service information referenced in this AD may be obtained from Airbus Industrie, 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) to include an airworthiness directive (AD) that is applicable to certain Airbus airplanes was published as a supplemental notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) in the **Federal Register** on January 3, 2003 (68 FR 315). That action proposed to require repetitive inspections for foreign objects between the slider and the girt bar attachment fittings of the emergency escape slides; a one-time inspection for correct adjustment of the slide release mechanism and the girt bar attachment fittings, which would terminate the repetitive inspections; a one-time test for correct extension of the girt bar through the sliders; and corrective action, if necessary.

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.

Request To Revise Compliance Interval

Two commenters request that the proposed AD be revised to change the repetitive interval for inspecting the emergency exit doors for foreign objects. The commenters request that the inspection be required not at the proposed 7-day interval, but only when the door is removed or maintenance is done on the door or slide assembly. The commenters assert that the emergency exit doors are not regularly opened and do not collect debris at the same rate as passenger doors, and that the interior side wall panels of the emergency doors prevent debris from being introduced into the slide release mechanism. The commenters suggest that opening the emergency exit doors every 7 days could accelerate wear of the slider and girt bar attach mechanisms and could increase the amount of dirt, debris, and corrosion introduced into the door mechanism. The commenters further suggest that the visual inspection be included in the aircraft maintenance manual upon installation and other relevant maintenance procedures regarding the emergency exit doors.

The FAA does not agree with the request. The girt bar, sliders, and attachment fittings of the emergency and passenger doors are identical in design and are located close to the floor. The girt bars of all doors are subject to the same risk of being affected by debris—regardless of how often the doors are opened—because of the open access to the cabin; debris can still reach and affect the girt bar of a closed door. In addition, according to the manufacturer, there is no risk of increased wear on the moving components due to frequent use. Further, the inspection for the emergency doors can be done quickly. No change to the final rule is necessary regarding this issue.

Request To Delay Issuance of AD Pending Revised Procedures

Two commenters request that the FAA delay issuing the AD until an appropriate measuring device can be developed to measure the gap between the sliders and the girt bar. The commenters state that the mechanism is poorly accessible and the measurement procedure requires special skills, tooling, and training to be accomplished consistently. They add that typical measuring tools are impractical due to the mechanism's close proximity to the fuselage door cutout, and the tool depicted in Figure 2, sheet 4, of the service bulletin referenced in the supplemental NPRM is difficult to

manufacture with the appropriate dimensional indications.

However, another commenter notes that, because operators had difficulties following the procedures to perform the measurements, Airbus has revised the service information to add work instructions and clarify the procedures to inspect and test the release mechanism attach fittings.

The FAA does not agree with the request to delay issuance of the AD. The service bulletin procedures for checking the slide release mechanism can be complex. As a result, Airbus has improved the instructions in the revised service bulletins (which were described in the supplemental NPRM). Furthermore, the measuring tool shown in Figure 2, sheet 4, of the service bulletins is provided as a typical example of a tool to be used for measuring the extension of the sliders over the girt bar; that tool can be easily made from any sheet of aluminum and is not considered a specific tool. In addition, no specialized training is necessary to perform this measurement. No change to the final rule is necessary regarding this issue.

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 as proposed.

Changes to 14 CFR Part 39/Effect on the AD

On July 10, 2002, the FAA issued a new version of 14 CFR part 39 (67 FR 47997, July 22, 2002), which governs the FAA's airworthiness directives system. The regulation now includes material that relates to altered products, special flight permits, and alternative methods of compliance. However, for clarity and consistency in this final rule, we have retained the language of the supplemental NPRM regarding that material.

Cost Impact

The FAA estimates that there are 103 Model A300 B2, A300 B4, A300 B4-600, A300 B4-600R, A300 F4-600R, A310, and A330 series airplanes of U.S. registry that will be affected by this AD. There are no Model A340 series airplanes currently on the U.S. Register; however, if an affected Model A340 series airplane is imported and placed on the U.S. Register in the future, the cost impact would be the same as for the remaining affected airplanes, as described below.

It will take approximately 2 work hours per airplane to inspect for foreign