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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Aviation Administration

14 CFR Part 39

[Docket No. 2002-NM-213-AD]

RIN 2120-AA64

Airworthiness Directives; McDonnell Douglas Model 717-200 Airplanes

AGENCY: Federal Aviation Administration, DOT.

ACTION: Notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM).

SUMMARY: This document proposes the adoption of a new airworthiness directive (AD) that is applicable to certain McDonnell Douglas Model 717-200 airplanes. This proposal would require inspection of the inboard ends of the outer skin panels of the horizontal stabilizer at Station Xh=+/- 7.234 for material defects, and corrective action, if necessary. This action is necessary to detect material defects in the inboard ends of the outer skin panels of the horizontal stabilizer, which could lead to cracks and an associated loss of strength in the attachments, and consequent reduced structural integrity of the horizontal stabilizer. This action is intended to address the identified unsafe condition.

DATES: Comments must be received by November 3, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Submit comments in triplicate to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Transport Airplane Directorate, ANM-114, Attention: Rules Docket No. 2002-NM-213-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-nprmcomment@faa.gov. Comments sent via fax or the Internet must contain "Docket No. 2002-NM-213-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 or 2000 or ASCII text.

The service information referenced in the proposed rule 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). This information may be examined 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.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Maureen Moreland, Aerospace Engineer, Airframe Branch, ANM-120L, FAA, Los Angeles Aircraft Certification Office, 3960 Paramount Boulevard, Lakewood, California 90712-4137; telephone (562) 627-5238; fax (562) 627-5210.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Comments Invited

Interested persons are invited to participate in the making of the proposed rule by submitting such written data, views, or arguments as they may desire. Communications shall identify the Rules Docket number and be submitted in triplicate to the address specified above. All communications received on or before the closing date for comments, specified above, will be considered before taking action on the proposed rule. The proposals contained in this action may be changed in light of the comments received.

Submit comments using the following format:

- Organize comments issue-by-issue. For example, discuss a request to change the compliance time and a request to change the service bulletin reference as two separate issues.
- For each issue, state what specific change to the proposed AD is being requested.
- Include justification (*e.g.*, reasons or data) for each request.

Comments are specifically invited on the overall regulatory, economic, environmental, and energy aspects of the proposed rule. All comments submitted will be available, both before and after the closing date for comments, in the Rules Docket for examination by interested persons. A report summarizing each FAA-public contact concerned with the substance of this proposal will be filed in the Rules Docket.

Commenters wishing the FAA to acknowledge receipt of their comments submitted in response to this action must submit a self-addressed, stamped postcard on which the following

statement is made: "Comments to Docket Number 2002-NM-213-AD." The postcard will be date stamped and returned to the commenter.

Availability of NPRMs

Any person may obtain a copy of this NPRM by submitting a request to the FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, ANM-114, Attention: Rules Docket No. 2002-NM-213-AD, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055-4056.

Discussion

The FAA has received a report indicating that the manufacturer of the horizontal stabilizer failed to ultrasonically inspect the inboard ends of the outer skin panels of the horizontal stabilizer at Station Xh=+/- 7.234 for material defects during manufacture of certain McDonnell Douglas 717-200 airplanes. Undetected defects in the material in the inboard ends of the outer skin panels of the horizontal stabilizer could lead to cracks and an associated loss of strength in the attachments. Cracks in the inboard ends of the outer skin panels of the horizontal stabilizer and an associated loss of strength in the attachments could lead to reduced structural integrity of the horizontal stabilizer.

Explanation of Relevant Service Information

The FAA has reviewed and approved Boeing Service Bulletin 717-55-0005, dated June 27, 2002. The service bulletin describes procedures for performing an ultrasonic inspection of the inboard ends of the outer skin panels of the horizontal stabilizer at Station Xh=+/- 7.234 for material defects, and for contacting Boeing for repair instructions. Accomplishment of the actions specified in the service bulletin is intended to adequately address the identified unsafe condition.

Explanation of Requirements of Proposed Rule

Since an unsafe condition has been identified that is likely to exist or develop on other products of this same type design, the proposed AD would require accomplishment of the actions specified in the service bulletin described previously, except as discussed below.

Differences Between Proposed Rule and Service Bulletin

Although the service bulletin specifies that operators may contact the manufacturer for disposition of certain defect conditions, this proposed AD would require operators to repair those conditions per a method approved by