

- Paragraph (a) has been revised to limit its applicability to airplanes on which the original issue of the service bulletin has not been done.
- Paragraph (a) has been revised to cite Revision 1 of the service bulletin.
- New paragraph (b) has been added to require inspection of airplanes on which the original service bulletin was done.
- Subsequent paragraphs have been reidentified accordingly.

Request To Withdraw the Proposed AD

One commenter requests withdrawal of the proposed AD as unnecessary. The commenter suggests that the proposed AD was prompted by an isolated incident during which multiple unfavorable conditions existed. The commenter, an operator, reports that, since the early 1990s, its affected airplanes have flown over seven million miles without an escape slide inflating inside the cabin.

The FAA does not agree with the request to withdraw the original NPRM. While few slides have actually inflated inside an airplane, there have been multiple incidents of escape slides dropping out of the closed door-mounted stowage compartment into the passenger compartment. An escape slide that drops out of its compartment could automatically inflate inside the passenger compartment and impede an emergency evacuation. This supplemental NPRM would mandate a design change that will prevent the slide from dropping out of its closed compartment.

Request for Additional Information

One commenter, an operator, suggests that the manufacturer investigate the prevalence of the incident that prompted this AD (*i.e.*, an escape slide dropping out of its closed door-mounted stowage compartment and inflating inside the passenger compartment). The operator asserts its intent to ascertain the background of the unsafe condition by requesting from Boeing all previous correspondence on this issue between the manufacturer and operators.

The FAA acknowledges the comment, although the commenter requests no specific change to the original NPRM. In light of the previous comment and response, the FAA finds it necessary to proceed with this AD action to address the identified unsafe condition.

Request To Extend the Compliance Time

Several commenters request that the proposed compliance time to replace the hinge assemblies be extended from 24 months to 36 months to enable

operators to do the work during the normal overhaul schedule for the escape slides.

The FAA agrees with this request. In revising this compliance time, the FAA considered the safety implications, parts availability, and typical maintenance schedules of affected operators. Extending the compliance time to the suggested 36 months will not adversely affect safety but will accommodate the time necessary for the operators to obtain replacement parts and schedule the work. Paragraph (a) of the original NPRM has been revised accordingly in this supplemental NPRM.

Request To Revise Compliance Time

Several commenters request revision of paragraph (b) of the original NPRM (paragraph (c) in this supplemental NPRM), which specifies that certain hinge assemblies may no longer be installed after the effective date of the AD. The commenters request that this compliance time be extended to coincide with the compliance time to replace all hinge assemblies. The commenters state that this extension would give operators more time to update airplane manuals and prevent unforeseen delays if parts are not readily available.

The FAA does not agree. Once an unsafe condition has been identified, the FAA generally prohibits that condition from being introduced (or re-introduced) into the fleet. When it is determined that replacement (safe) parts are immediately available to operators, the FAA typically prohibits installation of the unsafe parts as of the effective date of the AD. While this AD action was being developed, the FAA carefully considered all relevant information including parts availability and determined that sufficient parts would be available to meet operator demand.

Further, the FAA considers the period of time between publication of the final rule in the **Federal Register** and the effective date of the AD (35 days) sufficient for operators to determine their immediate need for parts and to obtain them. In individual cases where this is not possible, this supplemental NPRM contains a provision (in paragraph (d)) that would allow operators to request an extension of the compliance time, based upon a specific showing of need. The FAA considers that this provision ensures an adequate level of safety without imposing any undue burden on operators.

No change to this supplemental NPRM is necessary regarding this issue.

Request for Coinciding Compliance Times

One commenter questions the timing of this AD in connection with the issuance of AD 2001–15–01, amendment 39–12335 (66 FR 38361, July 24, 2001). AD 2001–15–01 requires modification of the escape slides by modifying the latch assembly and installing a cover assembly on the trigger housing of the inflation cylinder. The commenter advises that the two ADs will require closely associated work at different times. The FAA infers that the commenter requests harmonization of the ADs' compliance times.

The FAA does not agree. The compliance time for AD 2001–15–01 is 18 months for some actions and 36 months for the remaining actions, effective from August 28, 2001. Therefore, a coordinated work schedule for the two ADs would necessitate a shorter compliance time for the proposed requirements in this supplemental NPRM. As stated previously, the FAA finds the proposed compliance time extended to 36 months as requested to be adequate. No further change to this supplemental NPRM is necessary regarding the compliance time.

Request To Provide Alternative Actions

One commenter requests that the original NPRM be revised to provide for the option of repetitively inspecting and testing the hinge assemblies, instead of replacing them within the specified compliance time. The commenter states that the alternative repetitive inspections would prevent the unnecessary replacement of functional parts.

The FAA does not agree, based on the determination that the subject hinge assemblies are weak and must be replaced within the proposed compliance time. The FAA has determined that long-term continued operational safety will be better ensured by modifications or design changes to remove the source of the problem, rather than by repetitive inspections. Long-term inspections may not provide the degree of safety assurance necessary for the transport airplane fleet. This, coupled with a better understanding of the human factors associated with numerous repetitive inspections, has led the FAA to consider placing less emphasis on special procedures and more emphasis on design improvements. The proposed modification requirement is consistent with these considerations. No further