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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Aviation Administration

14 CFR Part 39

[Docket No. 2001-NM-107-AD]

RIN 2120-AA64

Airworthiness Directives; Airbus Model A320-111, -211, -212, and -231 Series 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 Airbus Model A320-111, -211, -212, and -231 series airplanes. This proposal would require repetitive inspections for fatigue cracking around the fasteners attaching the pressure panel to the flexible bracket at frame 36, adjacent to the longitudinal beams on the left and right sides of the airplane; and repair as necessary. This proposal would also provide an optional terminating action for the repetitive inspections. This action is necessary to detect and correct fatigue cracking around the fasteners attaching the pressure panel to the flexible bracket at the frame 36 adjacent to the longitudinal beams, which could result in reduced structural integrity and possible rapid decompression of the airplane. This action is intended to address the identified unsafe condition.

DATES: Comments must be received by December 17, 2003.

ADDRESSES: Submit comments in triplicate to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Transport Airplane Directorate, ANM-114, Attention: Rules Docket No. 2001-NM-107-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. 2001-NM-107-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 Airbus Industrie, 1 Rond Point Maurice Bellonte, 31707 Blagnac Cedex, France. This information may be examined at the FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Tim Dulin, Aerospace Engineer, International Branch, ANM-116, FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055-4056; telephone (425) 227-2141; fax (425) 227-1149.

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 2001-NM-107-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. 2001-NM-107-AD, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055-4056.

Discussion

The Direction Générale de l'Aviation Civile (DGAC), which is the airworthiness authority for France, notified the FAA that an unsafe condition may exist on certain Airbus Model A320-111, -211, -212, and -231 series airplanes. The DGAC advises that during fatigue tests, cracking was detected around the fasteners attaching the pressure panel to the flexible bracket at frame 36, adjacent to the longitudinal beams on the left and right sides of the airplane. Investigation revealed that the damage was caused by high loads in this area. Such cracking, if not corrected, could result in reduced structural integrity and possible rapid decompression of the airplane.

Explanation of Relevant Service Information

Airbus has issued Service Bulletin A320-53-1030, Revision 01, dated May 21, 2002. This service bulletin describes procedures for repetitive inspections for fatigue cracking around the fasteners attaching the pressure panel to the flexible bracket at frame 36, adjacent to the longitudinal beams on the left and right sides of the airplane; and repair if necessary. This service bulletin permits flight with cracks of specific lengths.

Airbus Service Bulletin A320-53-1030, Revision 01, includes procedures for the following actions:

- Repetitive rotating probe inspections on airplanes with a center fuel tank, or repetitive detailed inspections on airplanes without a center fuel tank, for cracking of the fastener holes that attach the pressure panel to the flexible bracket at frame 36, adjacent to the longitudinal beams.

- For certain airplanes on which cracking of specific lengths is found, installation of the applicable repair/modification kit (including modification of the pressure panel and longitudinal beams by removing material, inspection of bolt holes for cracking, repair of cracked areas, cold expansion of the bolt holes, and installation of a doubler).

Airbus Service Bulletin A320-53-1029, Revision 01, includes procedures for modifying the pressure panels located at frame 36 (including drilling