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DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Aviation Administration

14 CFR Part 39

[Docket No. 2003-NM-205-AD]

RIN 2120-AA64

Airworthiness Directives; Boeing Model 727, 727C, 727-100, and 727-100C 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 all Boeing Model 727, 727C, 727-100, and 727-100C series airplanes. This proposal would require repetitive detailed and special detailed inspections for cracks in the web, inner chord, and outer chord of the forward and aft frames of the aft cargo door opening; and repair of any crack found. This action is necessary to detect and correct such cracks, which could result in loss of the aft cargo door and rapid decompression of the airplane. This action is intended to address the identified unsafe condition.

DATES: Comments must be received by January 20, 2004.

ADDRESSES: Submit comments in triplicate to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Transport Airplane Directorate, ANM-114, Attention: Rules Docket No. 2003-NM-205-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. 2003-NM-205-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 Airplane Group, P.O. Box 3707, Seattle, Washington 98124-2207. This information may be examined at the FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW, Renton, Washington.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Ivan Li, Aerospace Engineer, Airframe Branch, ANM-120S, FAA, Seattle Aircraft Certification Office, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW, Renton, Washington 98055-4056; telephone (425) 917-6437; fax (425) 917-6590.

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 2003-NM-205-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. 2003-NM-205-AD, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW, Renton, Washington 98055-4056.

Discussion

The FAA has received numerous reports of fatigue cracks associated with the inner and outer chords of the forward and aft frames of the aft cargo door opening on Boeing Model 727 airplanes. The airplanes on which the fatigue cracks were found had accumulated between 24,000 and 51,000 total flight cycles. The fatigue cracks were discovered during the accomplishment of routine inspections and inspections specified in the Boeing 727 Supplemental Structural Inspection Document. This condition, if not detected and corrected in a timely manner, could result in loss of the aft cargo door and rapid decompression of the airplane.

Explanation of Relevant Service Information

We have reviewed and approved Boeing Alert Service Bulletin 727-53A0225, dated September 11, 2003, which describes procedures for repetitive detailed inspections and special detailed (high frequency eddy current) inspections for cracks in the web, inner chord, and outer chord of the forward and aft frames of the aft cargo door opening, and repair of any crack found. The alert service bulletin also recommends that operators contact Boeing for repair instructions. These inspections are recommended on airplanes before they have accumulated 24,000 total flight cycles, or within 3,000 flight cycles after the effective date of the AD, whichever occurs later, and are repeated at intervals not to exceed 3,000 flight cycles. A terminating modification to the repetitive inspections is currently not available.

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 AD and Alert Service Bulletin

The service bulletin specifies compliance times relative to the date of the service bulletin; however, this proposed AD would require compliance