This information may be examined at the FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Stephen Slotte, Aerospace Engineer, Standardization Branch, ANM–113, FAA, Transport Airplane Directorate, 1601 Lind Avenue, SW., Renton, Washington 98055–4056; telephone (206) 227–2797; fax (206) 227–1320.

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 notice may be changed in light of the comments received.

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 notice must submit a self-addressed, stamped postcard on which the following statement is made: ''Comments to Docket Number 94–NM–222–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–103, Attention: Rules Docket No. 94–NM–222–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, recently notified the FAA that an unsafe condition may exist on certain Airbus Model A310 and A300–600 series airplanes. The DGAC advises that it has received a report indicating that a debonded area was discovered on the upper skin of the elevator on one airplane during a routine visual inspection. When the external skin was cut to perform a repair of the debonded area, water was discovered in the elevator. The presence of water in carbon fiber elevators can cause debonding of the elevator skins. This condition, if not corrected, could result in degradation of the structural integrity of the elevator by causing stiffness of the elevator and by adversely affecting the capability of the elevator to transfer loads.

Airbus has issued Service Bulletins A310–55–2016 (for Model A310 series airplanes) and A300–55–6014 (for Model A300–600 series airplanes), both dated September 10, 1993, which describe procedures for repetitive thermographic inspections to detect water in the elevator. These service bulletins also provide procedures to protect and repair debonded areas of the elevator. The DGAC classified both service bulletins as mandatory and issued French airworthiness directive CN 94–184–157(B), dated September 14, 1994, in order to assure the continued airworthiness of these airplanes in France.

The French airworthiness directive also mandates the accomplishment of repetitive Tap Test inspections to detect disbonding of the elevator skins. Procedures for performing these Tap Test inspections are described in Airbus Model A310 and A300–600 Nondestructive Testing Manuals (NTM).

This airplane model is manufactured in France and is type certificated for operation in the United States under the provisions of section 21.29 of the Federal Aviation Regulations (14 CFR 21.29) and the applicable bilateral airworthiness agreement. Pursuant to this bilateral airworthiness agreement, the DGAC has kept the FAA informed of the situation described above. The FAA has examined the findings of the DGAC, reviewed all available information, and determined that AD action is necessary for products of this type design that are certificated for operation in the United States.

Since an unsafe condition has been identified that is likely to exist or develop on other airplanes of the same type design registered in the United States, the proposed AD would require repetitive Tap Test inspections to detect debonding of the elevator skins, and corrective actions, if necessary. These actions would be required to be accomplished in accordance with the NTM.

Additionally, this proposal also would require repetitive thermographic inspections of the elevator to detect trapped water if certain amounts of debonding are detected. These inspections, and necessary repair, would be required to be accomplished in accordance with the Airbus service bulletins described previously.

As a result of recent communications with the Air Transport Association (ATA) of America, the FAA has learned that, in general, some operators may misunderstand the legal effect of AD's on airplanes that are identified in the applicability provision of the AD, but that have been altered or repaired in the area addressed by the AD. The FAA points out that all airplanes identified in the applicability provision of an AD are legally subject to the AD. If an airplane has been altered or repaired in the affected area in such a way as to affect compliance with the AD, the owner or operator is required to obtain FAA approval for an alternative method of compliance with the AD, in accordance with the paragraph of each AD that provides for such approvals. A note has been included in this notice to clarify this.

This proposed AD also would require that certain water-affected areas be repaired in accordance with a method approved by the FAA. Accomplishment of a thermographic inspection and correction of any discrepancy, would terminate the repetitive Tap Test inspections, but would continue to require repetitive thermographic inspections.

The FAA estimates that 15 airplanes of U.S. registry would be affected by this proposed AD, that it would take approximately 5 work hours per airplane to accomplish the proposed actions, and that the average labor rate is $60 per work hour. Based on these figures, the total cost impact of the proposed AD on U.S. operators is estimated to be $4,500, or $300 per airplane, per inspection cycle.

The total cost impact figure discussed above is based on assumptions that no operator has yet accomplished any of the proposed requirements of this AD action, and that no operator would accomplish those actions in the future if this AD were not adopted.

The regulations proposed herein would not have substantial direct effects on the States, on the relationship between the national government and the States, or on the distribution of power and responsibilities among the various levels of government. Therefore, in accordance with Executive Order 12612, it is determined that this proposal would not have sufficient federalism implications to warrant the preparation of a Federalism Assessment.