



Memorandum

U.S. Department of
Transportation

Office of the Secretary
of Transportation
Office of Inspector General

Subject: **INFORMATION**: Audit Announcement –
Review of FAA’s Oversight of the Safety of
Commercial Airline Flight Decks
Federal Aviation Administration
Project No. 15A3012A000

Date: September 22, 2015

From: Matthew E. Hampton
Assistant Inspector General
for Aviation Audits

Reply to
Attn. of: JA-10

To: Federal Aviation Administration

On March 24, 2015, Germanwings Flight 9525 crashed in the Alps, killing all 150 people onboard. The crash is widely believed to be the result of intentional action by the copilot. Since 1994, at least four other incidents have been identified in which a pilot was either suspected or confirmed to have intentionally caused the crash. Additionally, in March 2012, JetBlue Airways Flight 191 was diverted after the first officer locked the captain out of the cockpit due to the captain’s erratic behavior. The flight landed safely, but the captain had to be subdued by passengers during the incident and was later criminally charged with interference with a flight crew.

Both the Germanwings and JetBlue Airlines incidents drew worldwide attention to the issue of flight deck safety, including securing cockpit doors. After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks,¹ the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) required all U.S. and foreign commercial aircraft flying to the U.S. to be equipped with fortified cockpit doors, including an internal locking device that can only be unlocked from inside the cockpit in order to prevent passengers from opening the door without the pilot’s permission.

Concerned about these issues, Senator Dianne Feinstein requested that we evaluate FAA’s oversight of commercial airline flight deck security. Specifically, the Senator requested that we examine how FAA mitigates the risk of intentional pilot actions

¹ Following the attacks, in November 2001, Congress created the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and tasked TSA to work with the FAA on security actions that may affect safety and aircraft operations. After the creation of TSA, FAA maintained the authority to protect aircraft in air during commercial flights.

against the aircraft, aircrew, and passengers; whether current aviation industry cockpit security and hiring standards are sufficient to ensure aviation safety; what steps FAA takes to evaluate the psychological health of pilots; and whether FAA's oversight of commercial airlines is sufficient to ensure cockpit security measures are implemented effectively.

Our audit objectives will be to assess the effectiveness of FAA's actions to (1) identify vulnerabilities to flight deck security, and (2) mitigate identified flight deck vulnerabilities. A second audit will be conducted to address the remaining questions posed by the Senator regarding pilot hiring and psychological assessments.

Our audit will include visits to FAA Headquarters and other locations responsible for commercial aircraft flight deck security. We plan to begin the audit in September 2015, and we will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. If you have any questions or need additional information please contact me at (202) 366-0500 or Tina Nysted, Program Director, at (404) 562-3770.

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cc: FAA Audit Liaison, AAE-100
DOT Audit Liaison, M-1
DHS OIG