

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-612](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Voluntary construction inspections are the primary mechanism by which FDA oversees compliance with its required sanitation standards for the construction of aircraft galleys and lavatories.

A report accompanying the House 2019 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill included a provision for GAO to review FDA's process for ensuring proper sanitation in aircraft galleys and lavatories. This report (1) examines the extent to which aircraft are inspected to ensure compliance with FDA's sanitation standards, and (2) discusses challenges FDA faces in providing aircraft inspections and how FDA is addressing such challenges.

GAO reviewed FDA guidance, interviewed FDA officials in headquarters and four selected field offices with high volumes of construction inspections, conducted site visits to meet with FDA inspectors, and interviewed representatives of selected aircraft manufacturers and airlines.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FDA develop a process for communicating directly with all U.S.-based commercial airlines to encourage them to request construction inspections. FDA generally agreed with our recommendation.

View [GAO-20-612](#). For more information, contact Steve Morris (202) 512-3841 MorrisS@gao.gov

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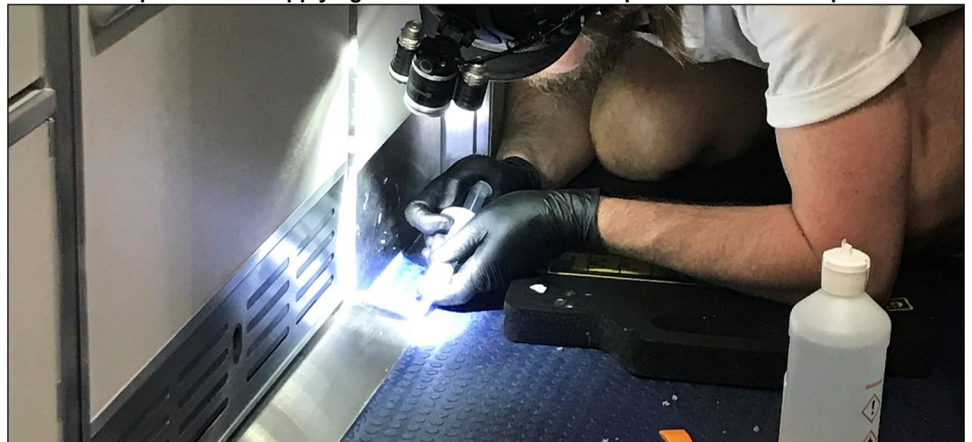
AVIATION SANITATION

FDA Could Better Communicate with Airlines to Encourage Voluntary Construction Inspections of Aircraft Galleys and Lavatories

What GAO Found

Most commercial aircraft undergo voluntary inspections to ensure that galleys and lavatories are constructed and assembled to meet the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) sanitation standards, according to industry representatives. Twenty-seven percent of the inspections FDA conducted between fiscal years 2015 and 2019 found objectionable conditions. But in nearly all of these instances, the conditions identified, such as the need for additional sealant in areas where there was a gap or seam, were corrected by the airline or aircraft manufacturer during the inspection. However, some regional airline representatives told GAO that their aircraft do not receive these construction inspections, either because larger airlines with which they have contracts told them the inspections were unnecessary or because they did not believe the inspections were relevant to them. FDA provides these inspections free of charge, upon request of aircraft manufacturers or airlines, and aircraft passing inspection receive a certificate of sanitary construction. Representatives of one aircraft manufacturer said they view the certificate as beneficial because their customers see it as a guarantee that the aircraft was constructed in a way that decreases the likelihood of microbial contamination, pests, and insects. While the construction inspections are important, they are not required, and FDA does not proactively encourage airlines to request them. By developing a process for communicating directly to all U.S.-based commercial airlines, including regional airlines, to encourage them to receive construction inspections, FDA could better ensure that aircraft meet FDA sanitation standards to protect passenger health.

An Airline Representative Applying Additional Sealant in Response to an FDA Inspection



Source: GAO. | GAO-20-612

FDA faces several challenges in providing construction inspections and is taking steps to address these challenges. For example, the demand for inspections by manufacturers and airlines is unpredictable, and FDA inspectors are responsible for inspections at multiple locations. To help mitigate these challenges, officials we interviewed from four FDA field offices said they usually request advance notice from industry to allow the agency time to allocate the necessary resources for construction inspections.