

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-508T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety, and Security, Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

FAA issues certificates approving new U.S.-manufactured aviation products, such as new aircraft, engines, and propellers. GAO has previously reviewed the efficiency of FAA's certification process and the consistency of its regulatory interpretations. As required by the 2012 FAA Modernization and Reform Act, FAA chartered two aviation rulemaking committees—one to improve certification processes and another to address regulatory consistency—that recommended improvements in 2012. FAA also assists U.S. aviation companies seeking approval of their FAA-certificated products in foreign markets. FAA has negotiated agreements with many of its counterparts in other countries to provide a framework for the reciprocal approval of aviation products. However, GAO testified in April 2015 that selected U.S. aviation companies reported challenges in obtaining such approvals, citing delays and cost.

This testimony discusses (1) the status of FAA's progress in implementing the aviation rulemaking committees' 2012 recommendations and (2) FAA's responses to the challenges that selected U.S. companies reported in 2015 that they faced when attempting to obtain foreign approvals of their products. It is based on GAO products issued from 2010 to 2015, selectively updated in March 2017 based on FAA documents and information from FAA officials and three key industry stakeholder organizations.

View [GAO-17-508T](#). For more information, contact Gerald L. Dillingham, Ph. D. at (202) 512-2834 or dillingham@gao.gov.

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AVIATION CERTIFICATION

FAA Has Made Continued Progress in Improving Its Processes for U.S. Aviation Products

What GAO Found

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has made progress in addressing two rulemaking committees' recommendations regarding its certification process and the consistency of its regulatory interpretations.

- FAA has completed 13 of 14 initiatives for addressing the 6 *certification process* recommendations. For example, 5 of the 13 completed initiatives involved improving and expanding its program that authorizes other organizations to act on its behalf in issuing certificates. The remaining initiative—issuing a final rule on regulations dealing with the certification of aircraft products—will likely not be issued this calendar year due to internal delays and the administration's efforts to review agencies' rules and regulations. FAA's Aircraft Certification Service (AIR) is responsible for implementing the certification process initiatives and the outcomes of the 14 initiatives are intended to be rolled into a larger organizational transformation concept. The initial phase involves restructuring AIR's organization, shifting its structure from a product-based focus to a function-based focus, with a new division responsible for monitoring and managing performance. FAA expects to complete this realignment in 2017, and noted that the overall aim of this transformation is to create a process that is more responsive to stakeholder expectations and more efficient and effective.
- FAA has completed efforts to address 2 of the 6 *regulatory consistency* recommendations, has efforts underway to address three, and is not planning to implement one. Completed efforts include ensuring better clarity in final rules and improvements in regulatory training for FAA personnel and industry. FAA is continuing work on an electronic platform to allow agency and industry users to access consolidated information on regulations and on creation of a consistency board to provide clarification on regulation-related questions from FAA and industry stakeholders. FAA did not establish a centralized support center to provide guidance to FAA personnel and industry, noting the consistency board would do this.

FAA has also made progress in developing measures for assessing the outcomes of the actions being taken for most of the initiatives. In addition, industry stakeholders GAO spoke to indicated a better sense of progress being achieved by FAA and better communication and collaboration from FAA.

FAA has continued efforts to address challenges that selected U.S. aviation companies reported facing when seeking foreign approval of their products. In April 2015, GAO testified on these challenges, which included the length and uncertainty of some approval processes, difficulty with communications, and high fees. FAA's efforts to address these challenges include working with its counterpart in the European Union to develop a "roadmap," approved in February 2016, of various initiatives aimed at reducing the time and costs of European approval of U.S. aviation products. According to FAA, completed changes have already eliminated approval and associated fees for all approved aircraft parts and reduced the approval time for simple low-risk modifications of product design from weeks to days. FAA plans to use this roadmap as a template for working with other countries on these issues.