

TWU NEWSROOM



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**Recent aircraft incidents have focused the public's attention on:
Is my plane safe? Good Question.**

TWU report highlights gaps in security, safety of aircraft maintenance

*Background checks, drug screening, not consistent
for mechanics working on U.S. aircraft;*

*Many U.S. carriers, even some with 100 percent domestic routes, are now
sending planes overseas to thinly regulated facilities for major overhaul*

Washington DC – A new report from the Transport Workers Union of America (TWU) highlights significant gaps in the safety and security of aircraft maintenance performed in outsourced repair facilities in the U.S. and overseas.

The study, *Who's Fixing My Plane: Aircraft Maintenance in America?* is based on a review of government audits and industry data. The report documents the fact that during the past decade, most U.S.-based airlines have outsourced a significant portion of maintenance and repair to third parties often located in third world countries. Beginning in July 2009, Southwest Airlines, for example, began sending large numbers of its 737s to El Salvador's largely unregulated Aeroman facility. The 100 percent domestic carrier continues to shuttle aircraft to Central America every month for repair.

“There is considerable evidence that many firms, indeed entire industries, seek to gain a competitive advantage by outsourcing abroad their productive activities, mainly to take advantage of lower standards of regulation or lower levels of enforcement,” said Dr. Emanuel Thorne, who chairs the Economics Department at CUNY's Brooklyn College and has been studying U.S. companies shifting work overseas to escape federal oversight. Added Thorne,

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“Outsourcing airline maintenance to avoid appropriate FAA regulation may be one such instance.”

The TWU study found that over 40 percent of aircraft repair and maintenance work at seven major carriers is now outsourced – a number that would be even higher if not for the large proportion of work still performed in-house at American Airlines, where TWU members have worked with airline management to deliver quality repair work in a cost-effective manner.

American Airlines outsources just 12 percent of its maintenance work, down from 15 percent in 2001. American and TWU have countered the industry trend towards increased outsourcing, and have developed a reputation for productive and affordable work that has allowed American to increase revenue by performing repair work for other carriers.

“There’s no room for error in the airline industry,” said TWU International President James C. Little. “Our members who repair aircraft for a living are very aware of the responsibility we have to protect every single passenger who gets on one of our airplanes. But we’re not playing on a level field – not when work at outsourced facilities overseas can avoid the certification of mechanics, background checks, and alcohol and drug testing that are a regular feature of TWU workplaces.”

Other key findings:

- An increasing proportion of airplanes flown by U.S. based airline carriers are maintained and repaired in overseas maintenance facilities, including locations such as China, El Salvador, Mexico, Singapore and Chile.
- The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has jurisdiction to inspect overseas facilities, but lacks the personnel to do the job adequately.
- Workers in overseas repair facilities, working on U.S. aircraft used by U.S. passengers, are not subject to routine background checks or drug and alcohol tests. **At least one member of Al Qaeda was found working at a major maintenance facility in Singapore in 2003.** The faulty procedures, which allowed these serious lapses in security, have not been addressed and will not be corrected by pending FAA reauthorization legislation without amendment.
- In addition to using overseas repair facilities, major U.S.-based airlines also outsource to U.S.-based companies, which also lack proper oversight. **One company was found to have multiple employees working on critical maintenance tasks with falsified immigration documents.**

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The FAA Air Transportation and Safety Improvement Act, now before Congress, offers an opportunity to maintain the safety of U.S. aircraft and protect U.S. passengers. Recommended steps include:

- ✓ Require all maintenance on U.S. aircraft take place in FAA-certified repair facilities.
- ✓ Require all repair facilities to meet uniform standards, including background checks, drug and alcohol testing and aircraft mechanic certification.
- ✓ Require, as a condition of certification, all repair stations to be subject to unannounced FAA inspections.

“Congress must act – and act wisely,” said Little. “In the airline industry, we prefer to fix our problems on the ground. Congress needs to give FAA the tools to help us do the job. That means uniform standards and rigorous inspections for aircraft repair – no matter where the repair takes place.”

The study, *Who's Fixing My Plane: Aircraft Maintenance in America?* Is available at:
<http://www.twu.org/downloadable/TWUAirMaintReport.pdf>

The Washington, D.C. –based Transport Workers Union of America (TWU) represents 200,000 workers and retires primarily in commercial aviation, public transportation and passenger railroads. The union is an affiliate of the AFL-CIO.

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