

US regulator to boost oversight of Boeing production line after 737 Max 9 blowout

► The FAA will assess safety risks after last week's incident led to the grounding of 171 jets with a similar configuration



A door plug, a panel fitted in place of an unused emergency exit, blew out during the Alaska Airlines flight last week. AP



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The [US Federal Aviation Administration](#) will increase its oversight of Boeing's production line as it reassesses safety risks a week after [Alaska Airlines](#) suffered a blowout shortly after take-off.

The accident involving a door plug – a panel fitted in place of an unused emergency exit – led to the grounding of 171 Boeing jets with the same configuration as the airline's [Boeing 737 Max 9](#) aircraft.

"It is time to re-examine the delegation of authority and [assess any associated safety risks](#)," FAA administrator Mike Whitaker said on Friday.

"The grounding of the 737-9 and the multiple production-related issues identified in recent years require us to look at every option to reduce risk."

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The FAA is exploring the use of an independent third party to oversee Boeing's inspections and its quality checks, he said.

"The FAA's statement reflects just how serious the issue is," Addison Schonland, partner at US-based AirInsight, told *The National*.

"The FAA has a history with the Max that brought their oversight under question. This means they are wary of any Max safety issue."

The US regulator will now be "very careful" with anything related to the Max, said Mr Schonland.

"The certification of the Max 7 and Max 10 will be even slower. Boeing will likely need FAA approval on any delivery, not just [the] Max," he said.

[Boeing's](#) chief executive Dave Calhoun said on Tuesday that the plane maker should accept the fault and make amends after the blowout [triggered concerns](#) about its quality standards.

He made the remarks during a company-wide meeting called to reinforce [safety as the top priority](#) for the company.

On Thursday, the FAA announced an investigation to determine if Boeing failed to ensure completed products conformed to its approved design and were in a condition deemed safe for operation in compliance with the regulator's regulations.

The Arlington, Virginia-based plane maker's 737 Max customers include flydubai, Southwest, United, American Airlines, Ryanair, Air Canada, Turkish Airlines and some Chinese carriers.

Regulators around the world said they were "closely monitoring" the situation.

The [UAE's General Civil Aviation Authority](#) said that none of the airlines in the country that operate the 737 Max 9 aircraft were affected.

Boeing is also in talks with its customers, with Mr Calhoun stating that such incidents "shake them to the bone, just like it shook me".

"This stuff matters. Every detail matters," he said on Tuesday.





An Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 Max-9 aircraft grounded at Los Angeles International Airport. The 737 is Boeing's bet-selling jet. Bloomberg

The actions announced by the FAA on Friday come a day after the regulator formally notified Boeing that it had launched an investigation into the company as a result of the Alaska Airlines incident.

The FAA will audit the plane maker's 737-9 Max production line and its suppliers to evaluate its compliance with its approved quality procedures.

"The results of the FAA's audit analysis will determine whether additional audits are necessary," the regulator said.

The FAA will also increase monitoring of 737-9 Max in-service events.

It will also conduct an "assessment of safety risks around delegated authority and quality oversight, and [an] examination of options to move these functions under independent, third-party entities", the FAA said.

The Alaska Airlines incident took place a week after Boeing urged airlines to inspect 737 Max aircraft for a possible loose bolt in the rudder control system.

Analysts said at the time that they did not expect any order cancellations for the Max.

The Alaska Airlines accident is the latest to affect the 737, Boeing's best-selling jet, which was grounded for two years in March 2019 after a defect in its flight stabilising system led to two fatal crashes.

In October, Boeing cut its 737 delivery target for this year, citing production quality problems at its biggest supplier Spirit AeroSystems, which makes fuselages for the narrow-body jets.

"The safety of the flying public, not speed, will determine the timeline for returning the Boeing 737-9 Max to service," the FAA said on Friday.



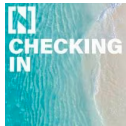


The Alaska Airlines plane is parked in Portland, Oregon, after a part of the fuselage blew out during flight. AP

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