

# THE GRAPEVINE

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## Safety in the air begins with quality maintenance on the ground

By Louie Key

The cover of our AMFA Constitution reads, "Safety in the air begins with quality maintenance on the ground," and our motto of Knowledge, Skill, and Integrity – these are the values that support our objective to "Safeguard with ceaseless vigilance, the safety of the air transportation industry in recognition of the high degree of public interest, confidence, and responsibility placed on the members of the Association..." We, as Aircraft Maintenance Technicians (AMTs), hold a public trust to maintain the airworthiness of the aircraft we service, which can be especially challenging because of the schedule-driven

airline business we operate in today.

Due to several recent events around our system, we must reemphasize the vital importance of working in compliance with all the requirements of our profession. The consequences for not doing so can be extremely serious. Your personal safety, the safety of those working around you, the safety of the aircraft you maintain, and ultimately those flying in them are at stake. Additionally, it is not only the safety aspect that we must concern ourselves with, your career and livelihood are likewise at risk. We have faced recent experiences where members have been terminated due to accusations that

the work they signed for was not done in accordance with maintenance manual procedures. In one instance, the Company is using recordings from fixed airport video cameras to support their claims.

Over the years, and throughout the airline industry, companies have relied on the productivity of our members to get the work packages completed. They continue to increase the volume of scheduled work, pushing the expected output to points beyond the capability of the available man-hours on shift. When the work cannot be completed they have attempted, in subtle ways, to intimidate, or incentivize, technicians to cut corners to get the

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# Workplace safety must be our number one priority

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Louie Key,  
National Director

work packages completed. So while the management team is completely aware that this practice is going on, and they rely on it to make

schedule, they are also prepared to discipline a technician whenever something goes wrong. It is a double standard that exposes our members to disciplinary and FAA certificate ramifications. We have to recognize this reality and be prepared to stand our ground.

With the above in mind, the National Executive Council (NEC) met recently to discuss the issue and develop a plan that will provide our members the representation they deserve, not only in contractual matters but also in the workplace safety and standards arena. National Safety and Standards Director David Brooks has been posting monthly articles providing compliance reminders that highlight the associated risks when an AMT does not follow maintenance manual procedures, task cards, or service bulletins. However, these articles alone do not seem to be getting the message out on a scale that appears necessary, and the NEC has decided to take action and respond to the threat to our members' safety and occupation – in fact we are charged by the AMFA Constitution to do so. Therefore, this article will serve as an introduc-

tion to a safety awareness campaign that will be ongoing and is intended to help support our members.

## **Some of the points we want to highlight are:**

- Always follow the maintenance manual, task card, or appropriate paperwork completely, without variation.
- If the paperwork identifies a specific tool for a task, you must use the specific tool; if it is not available, then do what is necessary to obtain the specific tool before you proceed. Be advised the FAA is verifying tool use and the tool checkout process is a quick and easy way for them to verify proper tool usage.
- Do not sign for any work you did not accomplish even if you are using the team concept for overnight work. If you are working with someone or working as a group, go step-by-step and be sure each item is signed for by the person who actually did the work. Only sign your name for the work you accomplished.
- Be aware of electronic tracking by your airport or company badges at access doors. Also, it's likely you're being video recorded on company or airport cameras while working around aircraft.
- Be aware of the company's drug and alcohol policy and the relevant DOT regulations contained in 49 CFR Part 40.
- Don't let management's inability to plan appropriately (lack of manpower, parts,

tools, equipment, aircraft scheduling, etc...), become your "emergency" that would subvert your legal obligation as an AMT to follow the maintenance manual and all paperwork as required by the FARs.

Most airlines are involved in the unfortunate practice of escalating the time intervals between maintenance checks or specific tasks. They justify this escalation on the number of recorded maintenance events for a particular component. If an AMT performs a quick "gate call" but does not record it in the maintenance log, the AMT has committed two separate offenses. First, the old saying that, "if it isn't documented, it didn't happen" applies. If you do not properly document the work performed, you degrade the margin of safety by denying future AMT's of critical maintenance history. Second, your hidden work accelerates the airlines' race to the bottom by justifying the future lengthening of maintenance intervals. You are required by the FAA to document all maintenance performed on the aircraft. Undocumented maintenance is unsafe maintenance.

The NEC would also like to remind everyone of the protections that you have in reporting safety concerns. There is the Aviation Safety Action Program (ASAP) that you should all be familiar with, and there are also whistleblower protections for employees in the aviation indus-

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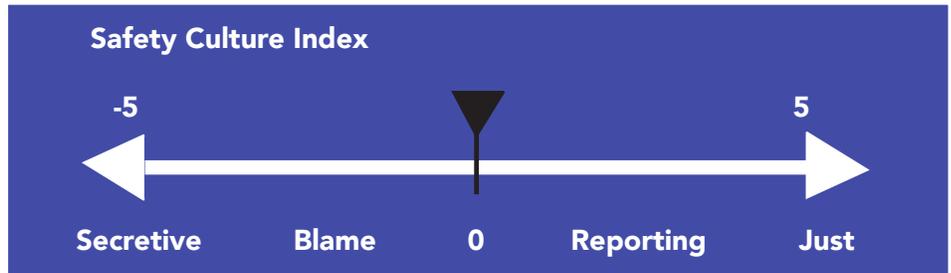
try known as “Air 21.” If you are aware of a regulatory violation, please do not hesitate to file an ASAP report; you may be preventing an accident by breaking one of the links in the chain of circumstances that could lead to catastrophic failure. You, your co-workers, or an aircraft full of passengers will unknowingly be forever in your debt for the accident that never happened because you helped prevent it.

For certain, this safety awareness campaign is not a one letter notice where we can check the box and we’ve done our part. Rather, this will be an ongoing initiative that we must all participate in.

We will be continuing with the compliance briefs and stepping up our communications that focus on the safety and compliance components of our jobs. We will be informing our local officers and representatives what they can be doing to further these objectives. Also, we ask that you

please contact your Local Safety and Standards Chairman if you identify a safety concern that needs to be resolved.

**Safety must always be our number one priority—bar none.**



According to the FAA's *A Practical Guide to Maintenance ASAP Programs*, annual safety culture surveys should be used to measure performance on the Safety Culture Index.

## From the Editor

By Justin Madden

You will quickly notice that this edition of the Grapevine is focused on safety and the ill-effects that can occur when we are not compliant. The National Executive Council felt so strongly about this matter that we took on the added expense of printing and mailing this edition to each of your respective homes.

As is touched on in several of the articles contained herein, the bond between the flying public and our craft is one of safety. When each passenger and crew member boards an aircraft, they expect that it is maintained to the safest extent possible, and that no corner was cut—regardless of motive. As licensed technicians, we have an immediate responsibility to ensure the safe travel of those who fly by accom-

plishing “quality” maintenance, thereby protecting and continuing the sacred bond that exists.

From the beginning, AMFA has and continues to believe that safety is an integral aspect of our craft. In fact, a leadership position with a direct responsibility for safety is maintained at both the national and local level—the National Safety and Standard Director and the Local Safety and Standards Chairman. This is unique to AMFA and is further evidence of how we as a craft-specific union are the best suited to represent and speak on behalf of the aircraft maintenance technician and related.

After reading the articles in this Grapevine, though they are serious and somber, and the pressure to comply is great, I want you to

recognize that you are a highly trained professional and how important our profession is to the industry. Don't forget why you chose a career in



Justin Madden,  
National Secretary/  
Treasurer

aviation and the satisfaction that is contained in making an aircraft airworthy. Take pleasure in knowing that as a direct result of your accomplishing “quality” maintenance, passengers, crew, and cargo will go on to their intended destination on a safely maintained aircraft. Finally, help each other. As fellow technicians, we are the greatest support network for each other that there could ever be. **Keep AMFA Strong!**

# Changing Times: Protect Your Career and Family

By Michael Nelson



Michael Nelson,  
Region II Director

Although the vast majority of us recognize the importance of being in compliance throughout our work day, there are apparently still a few who do not realize

that the days of the company being lenient in their response to an individual who has allegedly acted outside Federal Air Regulations (FAR), Maintenance Policy Manual (MPM), Aircraft Maintenance Manual (AMM), or any other policy they can apply, are over. Due to recent terminations at both airlines for compliance violations and leadership changes within the companies, explicitly Southwest Airlines, it is very important to discuss this issue. Guys are getting fired and families are being devastated, all because of actions that did not need to occur.

At both our carriers the workload (man hours required) routinely outweighs the available technicians on duty. Though each morning, or before each ETOPS flight, the paperwork is still getting completed and the aircraft are still being dispatched on time, even with this disparity. The companies have come to expect and demand this type of production, even to the point of encouragement through incentives. We cannot continue to work at these production levels and maintain the level of safety that is demanded of our profession. The days of disregarding personal safety, such as climbing up the L1 door hinges and walking the crown

to do a lighting strike inspection, are over. Furthermore, our workloads and regulations continue to grow and in many instances with less technicians being provided. We have an obligation placed on each one of us each day and for every task we accomplish. We are knowingly accountable for all of our work, in many instances until the aircraft is retired. Couple this burden with the time restraints of the airline schedule and one could easily understand how a non-compliant action could take place.

In addition to the already heavy workloads and working shorthanded, SWA's "EPIC" maintenance program which escalates the interval between heavy checks and dumps all the tasks that can't be escalated into the Line RON packages has arrived. Although the Alaska Airlines AMTs have had this type of program in place for some time, the Southwest AMTs are just starting to get a look at the enormous work packages and type of tasks being expected of them to be performed in the line environment. It is vitally important that all tasks are completed and all work is documented so the companies have a clear understanding of the actual time and tooling requirements to perform these checks. Management heavily relies on us to do whatever is necessary to get the work packages completed and have the planes ready for on-time departures. The company will not know where they are deficient if we continue to accommodate them by taking unnecessary risks that put our livelihood, and the livelihood of our families, in jeopardy. These companies have proven that they will sever support and aggressively discipline if they

find you are not operating within their policies; all the while they are expecting you to complete the checks without providing the proper support.

Another related topic is the importance of ensuring all of our maintenance is documented. Not only is it required by FARs, but producing documentation for your work is the only means we have to account for our production while on the clock. This is especially true when a company begins a new maintenance program and doesn't know what "findings" they can expect. We know they are keeping records of all aspects of maintenance, hence the 6-digit AMM references required in our sign-offs. If we do not document items that may seem trivial, we inadvertently give the companies bad data that may be used to justify escalating these tasks out of our packages and into a vendor's. Always pull a log page and get a receipt for the work that you have performed. Our senior leaders and the shareholders who run these companies don't know aircraft maintenance; they know how to turn a profit. Don't give them any reason to look at us as a means of cost savings because our value to the company isn't correctly documented.

Above all else, I feel it important for each of us to realize our value to our respective companies on a daily basis. We know what we may have done for them in the past, but times are changing. Don't let yourself get pressured into a compromising situation by the company. Protect your career and protect your families' well-being by always remaining in compliance.

# Outsourcing the American Dream



By Aaron Hansen

Americans face a serious threat as corporations outsource jobs to other countries. Outsourcing threatens to destroy the American Dream. This trend has left thousands of workers in the United States without work or underemployed. If the trend continues more U.S. jobs will be lost.



Aaron Hansen,  
Assistant National  
Director

U.S. employers are moving jobs at an alarming rate to countries such as Mexico, China, India, Romania, Singapore,

and the Philippines. Why pay U.S. workers \$18.00 per hour when employers can pay \$18.00 per day?

Outsourcing brings higher profits to U.S. businesses, but at what price for U.S. workers? This practice leads to a permanent degradation of our standard of living and undermines the ability of American workers to support their families. The consequences cut deeply into the heart of American people, across all racial, social, and economic classes.

Virtually everyone in this country is taught that hard work will bring success. If this principle dies, the soul of our country will perish. Despite this fact, employers undermine this principle everyday as they

lay off honest, hardworking people. Workers are losing their livelihood to corporate greed.

Think of a father who can't pay the mortgage, or consider a single mother who loses her job and is terrified that she can't feed her children. Think of the pain a child experiences, sensing the uncertainty caused by a provider's loss of income. How can outsourcing be good for America?

Outsourcing must end. Corporations must balance their drive to make profits with an equal commitment to the workers who generate those profits. State and federal governments must intervene to end this horrid practice. Our government needs to take a stand to end outsourcing, or at the very least, regulate it. If the government does not step to the plate, low paying jobs will continue to replace high paying jobs.

Government officials must realize that their primary interests are tied to the people who voted them into office. It is not right for our elected officials to fatten their pockets

while they turn their backs on their constituents. The time has come for politicians to do their job and take a stand. Elected officials must:

- Put America first
- Stop outsourcing American jobs
- Create more high paying jobs
- Increase funding for college education

Those of us who work at Southwest and Alaska Airlines are not immune to the consequences of outsourcing. Both Alaska and Southwest's business plan includes outsourcing over 70% of maintenance. In the past, Southwest only outsourced to domestic vendors, but recently we have seen planes going to El Salvador. Alaska, on the other hand, has kept its maintenance inside the U.S. so far with the exception of painting aircraft in Mexico City.

Both of our companies' business strategy has produced over 40 years of profits. Despite this strong financial performance, employees at Alaska and Southwest should still feel vulnerable. Like our fellow aircraft maintenance technicians at other airlines, and millions of American workers, we know that employment security is a thing of the past. The time has come to stand up for the American Dream and push back against outsourcing.



# Avoiding Fatal Consequences

By Dave Brooks

Continental Express Flight 2574 crashed near Houston, Texas killing fourteen people. An aircraft maintenance technician had left screws out of the horizontal stabilizer, and it was not relayed at turnover. This accident was caused by poor communication by the maintenance crew during shift change. The NTSB also blamed the crash on the corporate culture of the airline, stating that they placed more emphasis on ensuring airplanes take off on time rather than on correctly following safety procedures.



Dave Brooks,  
National Safety &  
Standard Director

*are highly skilled and responsible individuals with a public trust, and we shall continually strive for higher standards in aircraft maintenance, servicing, and handling in the interest of public safety and the industry.*

How can we better work on this issue? First of all, we need to be aware of what is happening and then come up with a solution. We have all seen our workload increase. Our work packages are larger and we don't seem to have as much time to finish them as we did before. We need to schedule our time wisely. Start by working on the high priority items first, and then work the lower priority ones. We might find out that at the end of the day, items may need to be carried over or turned over to another maintenance crew. Either way, what we are trying to promote is the best way to accomplish our work safely and efficiently. We need to make sure that we look at the ever-changing maintenance manual, and the company procedures manual for the latest revisions.

What we would like to avoid is any of the FAA's "dirty dozen," which are human factors elements that degrade people's ability to perform effectively and safely and could lead to maintenance errors.

We all know that bad things do happen, but for some reason we don't think they'll happen to us. Trust me when I say that there can be a time when all the holes line up and an unknown chain of events is released. Therefore, the message we are attempting to promote is that especially in these times, pay attention to detail, manage your time wisely, and accomplish your work per the AMM in a safe manner.

Air Midwest Flight 5481 crashed at Charlotte, North Carolina, killing twenty one people. AMTs incorrectly rigged the elevator control system, and the Center-of-Gravity (CG) was shifted back because of improper weight and balance. The technicians involved were under fire and attended a NTSB hearing.

Recently, in the FAA Safety tip 1404, we were advised about using correct compounds and lubricant. In the past, an improperly greased rod end failed in flight and caused a loss of control which resulted in a fatal aircraft accident.

Why am I citing these examples? Sometimes we need to be reminded as aircraft maintenance technicians of the awesome responsibility that is entrusted to us. These examples quite literally show the loss of life that could have been prevented. During these hard times of economic woes, technicians are often overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated when you consider the level of responsibility that we hold. We have to realize that one mistake in our job can have fatal consequences. I would like to remind everyone of what it says in our AMFA Constitution: Section 4-Technician Standards —*Aircraft Technicians*

# Whistleblower Protection for Aviation Industry Employees

By Lee Seham, Esq.

AIR 21 is a federal law that was enacted in 2000 to establish protection for employees of air carriers against retaliation for reporting potential aviation



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safety violations. Under AIR 21, an employee of an air carrier (or its contractors) is protected from retaliation for reporting alleged violations of federal laws related to aviation safety. AIR 21 makes it illegal for an airline employer to discharge or in any other manner retaliate against you because you provided information to, or caused information to be provided to your employer or the federal government about an alleged violation of federal laws of the FAA or any other provision of federal law related to air carrier safety. Retaliation is not limited to discharge, but may include any of the following: blacklisting; demotion; denying overtime or promotion; discipline; denying benefits; failure to hire or rehire; intimidation; reassignment affecting promotion prospects; reduction of pay or hours; and written warnings in certain circumstances.

All AIR 21 complaints are filed directly with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Therefore, if you believe that you have been retaliated

against in violation of AIR 21, you should file a complaint with the OSHA office responsible for enforcement activities in the geographical area where you reside or are employed. Complaints must be filed in writing by mail (certified mail recommended), fax, or hand-delivery. The date upon which the complaint is postmarked, faxed, or hand-delivered is considered the date filed. This is important because all complaints must be filed within 90 days after the alleged unfavorable retaliatory action (discharge, discipline, etc.) occurred.

To secure an OSHA investigation, you must raise an inference of unlawful discrimination. Moreover, to prevail at any hearing (post-investigation), you will be required to prove the following elements:

- That you engaged in protected activity (i.e., that you reported a violation of federal law relating to air carrier safety);
- That the employer knew about your protected activity;
- That an adverse action (discharge, discipline, etc.) was taken against you; and
- That the protected activity was a contributing factor in the adverse action taken against you.

As the second element makes clear – it is important that the employer knows about your reporting of safety violations. Therefore, if you

report these violations to federal authorities (such as the FAA) it is important that you provide a copy of the report to your employer as well so that the employer cannot later argue that it could not have retaliated because it was unaware of your report. If the federal government determines that the employer has violated AIR 21, it is empowered under the law to mandate reinstatement, back pay for lost wages, compensatory damages, and litigation costs, including attorney fees.

We have all seen the company posters that instruct us, as aircraft maintenance technicians, not to perform maintenance by memory, but to always check the applicable manuals. We are also unfortunately aware that some managers will want to try and control costs by cutting corners when it comes to maintenance. However, neither the FAA nor company policy permits you to engage in aircraft maintenance that does not conform to federal guidelines – including company maintenance programs approved by the federal government. As a federally licensed aircraft maintenance technician you are required by FAA regulations to strictly comply with FAR standards. Therefore, if a manager asks you to deviate from maintenance standards, they are asking you to violate federal law. AIR 21 was enacted specifically to protect you and your job from any retaliation for reporting any such violations.



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# Bargaining Update

By Earl Clark

At Southwest, Technician and Related negotiations are now approaching two years since the amendable date. All in all, we've had 44 days of face-to-face talks and have tentatively agreed to 12 articles. Our Committee continues to do "Whatever It Takes" to push back on the Company's concessionary proposals, including:

- A 20-hour duty limit
- Modifications to scope language which will weaken job security
- The contractual ability to use vendors to perform International Emergency Field Service
- An expanded wage scale
- Restrictions on paid rest
- Limit on the Company's requirement to backfill temporary vacancies with overtime
- "Qualifications" for specific bid locations

These items are worth much more than the Company is willing to put in your wages or benefits.

For our Southwest facility maintenance technicians, we have ac-

complished a total of nine sessions securing tentative agreement on 14 articles. We are using the language in the Aircraft Maintenance Technician agreement as our template.

At Alaska Airlines (ASA), the Company approached AMFA to discuss an expansion of the intent document for the yearly wage review process in Article 23 R. Local 14 and Local 32 ASA Airline Representatives joined me in meeting with the Company in May to discuss their proposals. We tried to preserve the process that we used this last year where we went to the midpoint between carriers ranked number two and number three. The Company proposed we accept a cap in how much of a raise we would get. We did not agree to a limit and will continue to use the language in the contract and the intent document from December 2007. In September, we are scheduled to meet with Alaska Airlines for the third of four annual wage reviews under the current agreement.

We are in the midst of the most critical time in our history as AMFA and technicians, as the

Local 11 SWA Airline Representative recently stated. We are constantly being bombard-ed psychologically into thinking that we are weak, divided, and unskilled.

We must be strong! It's about solidarity. It's about knowledge. It's about participation. It's about commitment. Ultimately, it's about controlling our destiny!

Are you sick and tired of hearing about low voting numbers, or low participation at meetings? How does the membership get motivated and stay motivated? It starts with awareness. It is everyone's responsibility to be aware. You should always vote, and encourage others to vote as well, otherwise you're letting someone else control your destiny. Every one of us needs to take one's obligation as a union member seriously. The Association is doing our part. When will you join in?



Earl Clark,  
Region I Director