

# Agency Orders Global Check On A380 Wings

Geir Moulson, Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Europe's air safety authority ordered checks Wednesday on the entire global fleet of Airbus A380 superjumbo jets for cracks on parts inside the wings — extending a previous order for nearly a third of the planes to be inspected.

The European Aviation Safety Agency's airworthiness directive orders that the planes longest in service be inspected within three weeks. Other aircraft will have to be inspected within six weeks, or upon the accumulation of 1,300 takeoff and landing cycles.

The order comes after the agency last month issued an airworthiness directive calling for "a detailed visual inspection" of the aircraft's so-called "wing rib feet" — the metal brackets that connect the wing's ribs to its skin.

Airbus said it has developed repair kits for the problem, which are currently being installed, and that despite the problems the aircraft remained safe to fly.

"These brackets are located on wing ribs which are not main load bearing structure, and, thus, the safe operation of the aircraft is not affected," Airbus said in a statement. "Nearly 4,000 such brackets are used on the A380 to join the wing-skin to the ribs. Only a handful of brackets per aircraft have been found to have been affected."

Still, EASA in its directive said that "this condition, if not detected and corrected, could potentially affect the structural integrity of the airplane."

The airworthiness directive last month applied to the 20 planes that have flown the most. EASA spokesman Dominique Fouda said the updated directive extends the checks to the entire fleet of 68, currently flying with seven different airlines.

"In parallel, we are working with Airbus on a long-term fix that should be ready by the summer," Fouda said.

He said the decision to extend the order was made "given the first results" of the inspections, but said he didn't have details on how many cracks have been found in total.

EASA's original Jan. 20 order came after Airbus said it had found new cracks on the brackets inside the wings of two superjumbos after inspections launched following a 2010 incident in which a Qantas A380's engine disintegrated in flight.

The agency gave airlines between four days and six weeks from Jan. 24 to carry out checks on the initial batch of planes.

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Sixty-eight of the double-decker, \$390 million jets are flying with seven airlines — including Dubai's Emirates, the largest A380 operator with 20 of the aircraft now flying. The jet seats 525 people in three classes.

Earlier Wednesday, Australia's Qantas Airways said it was temporarily grounding one of its A380s after discovering dozens of hairline cracks in its wings. It said, however, that the cracks were of a different type from those that prompted EASA's Jan. 20 directive.

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