Airbus To Drop Lithium-Ion Batteries In A350

The Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Airbus abandoned its plans to use lithium-ion batteries for its new A350 airplanes due to the uncertainty surrounding the technology following the grounding of Boeing's 787, the company said.

The European aerospace group said Thursday it would revert to conventional nickel-cadmium batteries for the A350. The plane is a wide-body long-range jet rival to the 787 and is expected to make its first flight around the middle of the year.

Airbus says it does not expect the battery switch to delay the A350's schedule.

Lithium batteries are lighter and can store more energy than other types of batteries of an equivalent size, and manufacturers view them as an important way to save on fuel costs. But the batteries are also more likely to short circuit and start a fire than other batteries if they are damaged, if there is a manufacturing flaw or if they are exposed to excessive heat.

Federal officials grounded the 787 last month because of problems with its lithium-ion batteries that caused one fire and forced another plane to make an emergency landing.

"Airbus considers this to be the most appropriate way forward in the interest of program execution and A350 XWB reliability," spokeswoman Mary Anne Greczyn said.

Airbus noted the A350 uses batteries in a different setup than the 787, making it unlikely that it would face the same problems. Its A350 flight-test program would still go forward with lithium-ion batteries.

But because the causes of the problems with the 787 batteries remain unclear, Airbus decided to make the switch "to optimize program certainty," Greczyn said. Airbus is a unit of Netherlands-based EADS NV.

The Wall Street Journal first reported on Airbus' decision to drop the lithium-ion batteries, noting the incidents with the 787 have led to industry uncertainty about future safety standards for the technology.

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