

Blowout on Alaska Airlines flight exposes ongoing catastrophic failure of Boeing 737 MAX jetliners

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8 January 2024

The international airline and travel industries are reeling after the Friday morning in-flight blowout of a “door plug” on a Boeing 737 MAX 9 airliner bound for Ontario, California, from Portland, Oregon, shortly after takeoff.

Twenty minutes into Alaska Airlines Flight 1282, as the plane reached an altitude of 16,000 feet, an unused cabin door separated from the aircraft and the fuselage immediately depressurized. Oxygen masks dropped and, as one terrified passenger told the *New York Times*, “The first thing I thought was, ‘I’m going to die.’”

The flight crew reacted quickly, dropping the aircraft to 10,000 feet and then returning the damaged plane to Portland International Airport for an emergency landing. No one on board was seriously injured. As airline experts have pointed out, if the plane had made it to higher altitudes, the door plug failure would have resulted in a much different outcome.

On Saturday, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) ordered US airline companies to stop flying some Boeing 737 MAX 9 planes until they are inspected. In a press statement, FAA Administrator Mike Whitaker said the agency “is requiring immediate inspections of certain Boeing 737 MAX 9 planes before they can return to flight.” He did not explain why the Emergency Airworthiness Directive (EAD) was required for just 171 airplanes worldwide.

On Monday, United Airlines reported that it found loose bolts and other “installation issues” on some of its 737 MAX 9 jets after they were inspected. A statement by the Chicago-based airline said, “Since we began preliminary inspections on Saturday, we have found instances that appear to relate to installation

issues in the door plug—for example, bolts that needed additional tightening.”

By Monday, the FAA approved guidelines for inspecting the door plugs on the MAX 9 jets and repairing them. In another statement, the federal agency made the perfunctory claim that its “priority is always keeping Americans safe,” and promised “enhanced inspections” and “corrective action requirements” to be completed by airline companies.

On Monday morning, Alaska Airlines deferred to a Boeing multi-operator message (MOM) that “provided inspection details for the 737–9 MAX aircraft, which have been approved by the FAA.” The airline stated further, “As we await further information from the FAA and work through these important steps, our technicians have prepared each aircraft to be immediately ready for the required inspection when instructions are finalized.”

For its part, Boeing issued a three-sentence statement on the catastrophic midair failure of its plane that said, “Safety is our top priority and we deeply regret the impact this event has had on our customers and their passengers.” The \$150 billion multinational airplane manufacturing company also defaulted to the US government agency, saying, “We agree with and fully support the FAA’s decision to require immediate inspections of 737–9 airplanes with the same configuration as the affected airplane.”

There is no question that Boeing and the airline operators are guilty of putting profits before passenger safety. A visit to the Boeing website page about the 737 MAX shows that the promotion of this line of jetliners is focused on “enhanced efficiency,” “excellent economics” and “14 percent lower airframe

maintenance costs” of the model.

The record of Boeing and the airline corporations with the 737 MAX has been one of ongoing lack of safety and deadly consequences for flight crews and the traveling public. There were two crashes, the first in October 2018, in which a 737 MAX 8 operated by Indonesia’s Lion Air plunged into the Java Sea and killed 189, and a second in March 2019, in which an Ethiopian Airlines flight nosedived after take-off and killed 157 passengers.

During the investigations following these deadly crashes—which established that the cause was a malfunctioning of the plane’s Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System (MCAS) which forced the planes into an unrecoverable nosedive—it was established that Boeing ignored employee warnings about the potential for failures of the system.

In the present blowout of the door plug, it has now been reported that the Boeing aircraft was restricted from being used for longer flights to Hawaii after a warning light indicating a pressurization problem lit up on three different flights.

According to a report by ABC News, “Alaska Airlines decided not to let the aircraft make long flights over water so that it ‘could return very quickly to an airport’ if the warning light reappeared.” This statement was made on Sunday by Jennifer Homendy, chair of the National Transportation Safety Board.



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