

“They are putting out defective airplanes”

Boeing whistleblower Sam Salehpour testifies before Congress on safety of the 777 and 787 aircraft

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The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee held a hearing on Wednesday with Boeing quality engineer and whistleblower Sam Salehpour. The topic was ongoing and serious safety and quality issues surrounding the Boeing 777 “Triple Seven” and 787 Dreamliner aircraft.

Salehpour highlighted production issues in connection with 98.7 percent of 787 Dreamliners, where Boeing did not fill tiny gaps, “shims,” between different parts of the fuselage. Repeated pressurization of the aircraft, which occurs on every commercial flight and allows humans to survive inside the plane at altitudes where the air is too thin to breathe, creates weak points that risk the body of the plane simply falling apart mid-flight, killing everyone on board.

Salehpour, who has been an engineer for 40 years, pointed out that while “Boeing’s PR team likes to call [shims] the width of a human hair,” even gaps that small “when you are operating at 35,000 feet ... can be a matter of life and death.”

He continued, “In a rush to address bottlenecks in production, Boeing hid problems, pushing pieces together with excessive force to make it appear that the gaps don’t exist.”

This may, he continued, “result in premature fatigue failure. Effectively they are putting out defective airplanes.”

After he raised these concerns internally, Boeing management moved Salehpour to the 777 program. There, he also witnessed numerous safety violations and improper methods of fitting parts together, including “literally jumping on pieces of the airplane to

get them to align.”

The subcommittee also heard from several other expert witnesses on the lack of internal quality standards and profit-driven culture within Boeing. The witnesses included Joe Jacobson, a technical adviser to the Foundation for Aviation Safety and former FAA engineer; Ed Pierson, executive director of the Foundation for Aviation Safety and a former Boeing manager; and Shawn Pruchnicki, a professor at Ohio State University and integrated systems engineer.

Jacobson, in particular, is noted for highlighting over many years Boeing’s practice of “trying to maximize profits” at the expense of safety. In his opening statement, he said that in his prior position at the FAA he should have been informed by Boeing about the deadly MCAS system, which was the immediate cause of Boeing 737 Max 8 jetliner crashes in October 2018 and March 2019, which killed a combined total of 346 passengers and crew.

Pierson, another Boeing whistleblower, became well-known in 2019 after he testified that he warned senior company management in the summer of 2018 that “deteriorating factory conditions” at the Renton, Washington Boeing 737 production facility would ultimately create a catastrophic failure, the first of which happened only months later.

To this day, no Boeing executive has been tried for murder or held accountable in any way for these preventable deaths.

The comments from Salehpour and all those who testified highlight both the ongoing dangers of flying on board Boeing aircraft and the fact that, despite all

the claims by Boeing to the contrary, there has never been any shift from the aerospace giant's drive for corporate profits at the expense of human lives.

It is also clear that a critical part of Boeing's internal culture is direct retaliation against internal complaints. Salehpour testified that "I was told to 'shut up,' I was sidelined, I received physical threats." He continued, "My boss said, 'I would have killed someone who said what you said in a meeting.'"

Salehpour also presented photos of his car tire, which he said his mechanic told him had a nail jammed into it. While he told the subcommittee he had "no proof" of Boeing's involvement, he testified he believed it happened at work.

He was, however, uncowed. He told the committee, "We are the eyes and ears of the public. That's how I see our job."

He continued, "After the threats and after all this, it really scares me, but I am at peace. If something happens to me, I am at peace because I feel like by coming forward, I will be saving a lot of lives."

Salehpour's testimony raises further questions about the suspicious death of Boeing whistleblower John Barnett. Barnett was slated to give a third day of testimony in a civil suit against Boeing when he was found dead in a hotel parking lot in Charleston, South Carolina on March 9. The suit was brought by Barnett and accused Boeing of forcing him out of the company in 2017 after he raised multiple serious concerns about the safety of the 787 Dreamliner.

While the county coroner declared that the death was a "self-inflicted gunshot wound," news coverage afterwards revealed that Barnett told a family friend, "If anything happens to me, it's not suicide."

More recently, Barnett's mother Vicky Stokes told CBS News, "I think if this hadn't gone on so long, I'd still have my son. My sons would still have their brother, and we wouldn't be sitting here." She went on to say that she held Boeing responsible for her son's death.

That none of the senators raised the death of Barnett and the highly suspicious circumstances surrounding it is in line with the near-total blackout by the media of the supposed "suicide" of the whistleblower.

The corporate giant Boeing sits at the heart of American imperialism, both as a major exporter and a supplier of US war materiel, including equipment used

by Israel in its genocide against Gaza. There is every reason to believe that the mafia-like actions described by Salehpour are standard practice by Boeing—enabled by the two big business parties, Congress, federal regulators, the corporate media and the courts—to protect its interests and those of US capitalism as a whole.



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