

Boeing near-disasters continue to pile up in wake of sweetheart plea deal

Bryan Dyne
12 July 2024

A plea agreement was reached between Boeing and the US federal government on Sunday in which the aerospace corporation would plead guilty to fraud in order to avoid further charges stemming from the two 737 MAX 8 crashes in 2018 and 2019, which killed 346 passengers and crew.

Under the agreement, Boeing will pay \$698.6 million, including a minimum of \$455 million in “safety and compliance” programs and a \$243.6 million in fines. The totals are barely a slap on the wrist for the aerospace giant, which made \$7.7 billion in 2023. They are also an insult to the families of those who died after the company knowingly put the faulty 737 MAX 8 into service. Moreover, nothing is being put into place to force Boeing to change its practices.

The current plea deal only came about after an investigation by the Department of Justice began this year in the wake of the near-fatal door blowout in January on a 737 MAX 9 shortly after take-off. Dozens were injured and it was only luck that the blowout occurred so soon after takeoff, and not while the plane was cruising and tens of thousands of feet higher in altitude, which would have resulted in the death of all on board.

All that emerged from the government’s investigation is that Boeing had not developed its internal quality control methods as much as previously agreed, thus violating a deferred prosecution agreement from 2021. The only people being held accountable are two employees who lied to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) about the risks of the Maneuvering Characteristics Augmentation System, the immediate cause of the two MAX 8 crashes.

The executives who pushed for the system in the pursuit of faster production over airplane safety, including ex-CEO Dennis Muilenburg and current

Boeing head David Calhoun, have gotten off scot-free. Numerous testimonies, including at Congressional hearings, show Boeing’s management was aware of the dangers of MCAS and proceeded with making the MAX 8 anyway in order to keep Boeing’s profits and stock prices high.

None of them have faced charges for the manslaughter, much less murder, of passengers and crew caused by crashes that were a known inevitability.

Nor have any of them faced charges related to the numerous other serious quality control problems at Boeing that have come to light this year. In the wake of the January door blowout, dozens of whistleblowers have come forth exposing the fact that management at the airplane company and its supplier, Spirit AeroSystems (recently re-acquired by Boeing), were not only aware of but encouraged shortcuts in production at the expense of the safety of the flying public.

In the words of Joe Jacobson, a technical adviser to the Foundation for Aviation Safety and former FAA engineer who testified before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Subcommittee in April, all Boeing was concerned about was “trying to maximize profits.”

Among the most significant whistleblowers at Boeing have been John “Mitch” Barnett and Joshua Dean. Barnett was a quality manager at the company for three decades who attempted repeatedly to bring to management’s attention serious issues in the production of Boeing’s 787 “Dreamliner” at the company’s facility in South Carolina.

Joshua Dean worked at Spirit AeroSystems and gave a deposition against his former employer that alleged “serious and gross misconduct by senior quality management of the 737 production line.”

Both faced repeated retaliation from their respective companies while still working for them, and were both forced out, Barnett in 2017 and Dean in 2020 and then again, after being rehired, in 2023. Both died earlier this year under suspicious circumstances. Barnett in particular told a family friend, “If anything happens to me, it’s not suicide.”

Alongside the whistleblower comments, Boeing has continued to face a deluge of accidents on its planes, further exposing the lack of quality and safety controls inside the company.

On Sunday, a Boeing 737-700 operated by Air Do traveling to Tokyo had a hydraulic failure during its approach for landing to Kushiro Airport. As a result of the fault and adverse weather conditions, the aircraft was forced to divert north to Nakashibetsu Airport, where it landed successfully before becoming disabled on the taxiway.

On Monday, the FAA revealed it has ordered an inspection of 2,600 Boeing 737 MAX and Next Generation airplanes after reports came in that, in the event an airplane depressurizes, oxygen masks might not supply oxygen to passengers.

That same day, a Boeing 757 traveling from Los Angeles to Denver lost one of its tires for its main landing gear during takeoff. The flight proceeded and landed successfully with no injuries during takeoff, flight or landing.

On Tuesday, a Boeing 777 scraped its tail along the runway for hundreds of meters while attempting to take off. The jetliner is from the Chilean airline Latam and was attempting to take off from Italy’s Milan Malpensa Airport. The plane, which can carry more than 500 passengers, was “packed” and only barely averted a disaster that could have killed everyone on board.

On Wednesday, a tire caught fire during the takeoff of an American Airlines flight of a Boeing 737-800. The 180 passengers were “safely deplaned,” according to airline spokesman Alfredo Garduno in a comment to the *USA Today*.

And on Friday, the pilot of a Boeing 757-23N declared a “squawking 7700” emergency after reportedly losing control of their plane as a result of leaked hydraulic fluid, according to FlightRadar24. The flight, which was headed from Spain to England, was successfully rerouted and landed safely at Manchester Airport.

The numerous ongoing and potentially fatal problems make the plea deal all the more egregious. Every sign points to serious and systemic problems with Boeing’s quality control and safety measures that are driven by management solely for corporate profits and stockholder dividends. The same issues that caused the MAX 8 crashes persist and will inevitably lead to the further loss of human life.

Workers and youth are increasingly aware of these dangers. In a poll taken in April, more than 50 percent of US flyers said they would pay \$50-\$150 more for flights not on Boeing aircraft. Nearly 24 percent said they would pay up to \$50 to avoid Boeing and more than 19 percent said they would pay \$151-\$250 to stay away from the dangerous planes. And nearly 37 percent of respondents said that, if they could, they would avoid flying on Boeing aircraft altogether.

Yet nothing substantial will come from the federal government. Last year, Boeing earned 37 percent of its \$78 billion revenue from government contracts, primarily in defense. It is a key part of the US-backed genocide in Gaza and NATO’s war drive against Russia and China. The lives lost on commercial airlines barely register on the war plans of the imperialist powers.

Thus, the need for the nationalization of Boeing and the airline industry as a whole becomes all the more important. It’s not enough to know Boeing’s planes are deathtraps; the underlying motive force of capitalist production must be understood. That profits come before human lives is not a moral question of this or that CEO but based in the outmoded socio-economic system upon which Boeing and the entire US political and military apparatus rests. The only way the ongoing disasters can be ended is as part of a revolutionary struggle by the working class to overthrow capitalism and build a new socialist society where production and safety are placed under workers’ control.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact