

NTSB report reveals Boeing knew of fatal defect in UPS plane that killed 14 in Louisville

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A report released Wednesday by the National Transportation Safety Board reveals that Boeing was aware of a structural defect in the engine mounting system that caused a UPS cargo plane to crash in Louisville, Kentucky, in November 2025, killing 14 people. The company had documented four previous failures of the same component on three different aircraft but concluded the defect would not create a safety hazard.

The NTSB investigative update provides damning evidence that both Boeing and UPS possessed knowledge of a recurring mechanical failure years before the disaster, yet took no meaningful action to prevent it. The crash of UPS Flight 2976 on November 4, 2025, which killed three crew members and 11 people on the ground, was entirely preventable.

The NTSB report states that the spherical bearing race, a critical component securing the left engine to the wing, fractured completely during takeoff. Laboratory examination found that fatigue cracks had formed around the entire circumference of the bearing's interior surface, ultimately encompassing 75 percent of the fracture area before final over-stress failure occurred.

This type of progressive fatigue cracking does not develop overnight. The bearing had been experiencing cyclic stresses over an extended period, gradually weakening until catastrophic failure during the takeoff roll.

The most damning revelation in the NTSB report concerns Boeing Service Letter MD-11-SL-54-104-A, issued in February 2011. This document informed operators that the same type of bearing had failed four times previously on three different MD-11 aircraft. Each of these failures initiated at precisely the same location—the design recess groove on the interior surface of the bearing race—and resulted in the bearing splitting into two pieces.

Despite this pattern of repeated failures in a component

that secures a multi-ton engine to the wing, Boeing determined that such failures would not result in a safety-of-flight condition. The company's response was to recommend that the bearing be inspected during routine general visual inspections, typically conducted every 60 months.

This inspection protocol was grossly inadequate. A visual inspection can only detect whether the fractured bearing pieces have migrated beyond the outer surface of the mounting lugs. It cannot identify internal fatigue cracking that has not yet progressed to complete fracture. Boeing's own service letter acknowledged that in the previous failures, the problem was identified only after the bearing had already split completely and the pieces had visibly displaced.

Furthermore, Boeing recommended installation of a redesigned bearing that eliminated the problematic recess groove but did not prohibit operators from continuing to install the defective original design. UPS followed the bare minimum requirements, inspecting the bearing assembly every 72 months rather than Boeing's recommended 60 months. The bearing assembly on the crashed aircraft had last been inspected in October 2021, nearly four years before the disaster.

The 34-year-old MD-11 that crashed had been taken out of service from September 3 to October 18, 2025, for what is known as a heavy check at a maintenance facility in San Antonio, Texas. During this six-week inspection, which included test flights, mechanics repaired a crack in the center wing fuel tank and addressed corrosion in the cargo area. Yet the fatigue cracking in the spherical bearing race—which would claim 14 lives just weeks later—went undetected.

UPS has a documented record of opposing safety regulations. According to FAA records, the company objected to an FAA airworthiness directive that would have required inspection of wiring harnesses inside the

engine pylons of MD-11 aircraft. UPS claimed the inspection would take too long and that Boeing lacked replacement parts for the obsolete planes. This objection concerned the very aircraft type and the very area of the plane where the fatal structural failure occurred.

The corporate press has reported these facts in a sanitized manner, merely reciting facts and technical details. *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, the *Associated Press*, and the BBC all note Boeing's prior knowledge of the bearing failures but stop short of drawing the obvious conclusion: Boeing and UPS knowingly operated aircraft with a defective component that had already failed multiple times, and 14 people died as a result.

The NTSB's language is carefully neutral in tone, but the facts speak for themselves. A critical structural component failed repeatedly. The manufacturer was aware of this pattern. The design flaw was known. Yet the aircraft continued to fly, and workers paid with their lives.

This disaster must be understood in the broader context of capitalist aviation. The MD-11, originally manufactured by McDonnell Douglas before its absorption by Boeing in 1997, has the second-worst safety record of any commercial aircraft still in service. Airlines phased out passenger service on these aircraft years ago because newer models are more fuel-efficient. However, UPS and FedEx continued operating dozens of them for cargo flights, where profit margins on aging equipment outweighed concerns for crew safety.

The Louisville crash occurred during the longest government shutdown in US history, with NTSB investigators working without pay. Air traffic controllers faced the choice between working complex technical jobs for free or taking unpaid leave to support their families. The Federal Aviation Administration had furloughed 25 percent of its workforce. These conditions did not directly cause the crash, but they reflect the broader assault on safety oversight and regulatory capacity.

Boeing, meanwhile, continues to receive billions in government contracts despite its long record of safety failures. Earlier in 2025, criminal charges against the company over the 737 MAX scandal, which killed 346 people in two crashes, were dropped.

UPS has pursued an identical trajectory. The company reported net income of \$5.7 billion in 2024 and \$6.7 billion in 2023. It reopened its Worldport facility in Louisville the day after the crash, ensuring that package processing continued without interruption. In the weeks following the disaster, UPS Airlines President Bill Moore

assured investors that the company had leased replacement aircraft and was putting more packages on trucks to make up the capacity difference from grounding the MD-11 fleet.

The Teamsters union, which represents UPS workers, issued only a perfunctory statement after the crash. Teamsters President Sean O'Brien, who has emerged as a vocal supporter of the Trump administration, blocked a potential strike by 340,000 UPS workers in 2023 and negotiated a contract that he hailed as historic. That agreement paved the way for mass layoffs and the continuation of the precarious part-time work system that leaves many UPS employees unable to afford housing without roommates.

The Democrats issued equally perfunctory statements, reflecting their subservience to Wall Street and major military contractors. Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear, a Democrat, appeared at press conferences expressing sympathy for victims while taking no action to hold Boeing or UPS accountable for the preventable deaths. This continues the policies of the Biden administration, which did not prosecute Boeing for the deaths of passengers and crew in the 737 MAX 8 crashes and intervened to block railroad workers from striking over safety concerns in 2022.

The fight for safe working conditions cannot be entrusted to corporations, regulatory agencies, or the union bureaucracy. Workers must organize independent rank-and-file committees to assert democratic control over safety inspections, maintenance schedules and operational decisions. These committees must be linked internationally through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to coordinate the struggle against the systematic subordination of worker and community safety to private profit.

Disasters like the November Louisville air crash will continue as long as the aviation and logistics industries remain under the control of a corporate oligarchy concerned only with quarterly earnings and stock prices. The operation of these essential systems must be transferred to public ownership and placed under the democratic control of the working class as part of the fight for socialism.



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