

■ To
Airlines and
Maintenance organisations

Subject Interim warning in response to two serious incidents involving commercial aircraft

The Dutch Safety Board is currently investigating two serious incidents involving commercial aircraft that had not been in use for some time in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortly after takeoff, the aircraft operated by Transavia and TUI fly encountered problems with their speed and altitude indications. The ongoing investigations provide sufficient grounds for the Safety Board to issue a warning concerning risks relating to the return to service of commercial aircraft.

When aircraft are temporarily placed into storage, the system used to measure air pressure is covered. This prevents lines from becoming blocked (for example by insects). Prior to the return to service of the aircraft, the cover must once again be removed. Following longer periods of storage, pressure lines that form part of the same air data system are also disconnected and cleaned. They must then be reconnected.

The air data system delivers essential information to two important flight instruments, the airspeed indicator and the altimeter. In one of the incidents mentioned above the cover had not been removed, and in the other incident a number of the pressure lines had not been correctly reconnected. In both cases, this resulted in a situation whereby the pilots were presented with incorrect altitude and airspeed information on their standard instruments.

In both incidents being investigated by the Safety Board, the weather conditions were such that the flight crews were able to make use of visual references outside the aircraft. This, as well as using standby instruments, enabled the flight crews to maintain control over the speed and attitude of the aircraft. It is not possible for flight crews to test the air data system prior to commencing flight.

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) previously published a warning outlining safety risks resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. In this warning, the EASA also referred to the return to service of aircraft. In March 2021, aircraft manufacturer Boeing sent a warning to its customers in response to an occurrence in October 2020. In that incident, air data modules of a Boeing 777 had not been properly connected following maintenance activity.

The safety risks associated with the maintenance activities described above were known in both cases. This did not prevent both incidents from occurring. Due to the expected increase in the number of flights as a consequence of the easing of the COVID-19 measures in the Netherlands and abroad, many aircraft are expected to be returned to service over the coming months. This will result in a rise in the number of non-standard maintenance activities.

These incidents show that additional attention is required to address these risks. In light of this, the

Dutch Safety Board considers the safety risks referenced above to be sufficiently serious to issue an interim warning to airlines and maintenance organisations pursuant to Section 63 of the Dutch Safety Board Act in anticipation of the publication of the full investigation reports.¹ I would hereby ask you to appropriately inform all your employees of these safety risks.

Regards,

THE CHAIRMAN OF THE DUTCH SAFETY BOARD



J.R.V.A. Dijsselbloem

¹ Article 63: If necessary for immediate action in order to prevent accidents, the Board shall already make its recommendations for preventive measures while the investigation is still in progress.