AVIATION SAFETY

FAA Management Practices for Technical Training Mostly Effective; Further Actions Could Enhance Results

Why GAO Did This Study

One key way that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) makes air travel safer is to inspect the manufacture, operation, and maintenance of aircraft that fly in the United States. To better direct its resources, FAA is shifting from an inspection process that relied on spot-checks of compliance with regulations to one that evaluates operating procedures and analyzes inspection data to identify areas that pose the most risk to safety (called system safety). While FAA believes the new approach requires some technical knowledge of aircraft, Congress and GAO have long-standing concerns over whether FAA inspectors have enough technical knowledge to effectively identify risks.

GAO reviewed the extent that FAA follows effective management practices in ensuring that inspectors receive up-to-date technical training. In addition, GAO is reporting on technical training that the aviation industry provides to FAA.

What GAO Recommends

Within the context of an overall system safety approach, GAO recommends that FAA take several actions, including systematically assessing inspectors' technical training needs. FAA officials generally agreed with the contents of this report and agreed to consider GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-728.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Gerald Dillingham at (202) 512-2834 or DillinghamG@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

For its technical training, FAA follows many of the effective management practices for training that GAO has advocated and is improving its efforts in others. (See below.) In planning, FAA has linked technical training efforts to its goal of safer air travel and has identified technical proficiencies needed to improve safety inspectors' performance in meeting this goal. It plans to better relate training to job tasks and is in the early stages of developing an approach to set priorities for new courses and course revisions.

FAA Mostly Follows Effective Management Practices for Its Technical Training

Element	Extent followed
Practices in planning training efforts	Mostly
Practices in developing training curriculum and courses	Mostly
Practices in delivering training	Partially
Practices in evaluating training efforts	Mostly

Source: GAO.

In developing technical courses, FAA has a structured process aimed at ensuring that courses meet performance objectives. It allows inspectors and others to identify the need for new training courses and to aid in developing courses. FAA is developing an initiative to systematically identify specific technical competencies and training requirements for inspectors.

In delivering courses, FAA offers a wide array of technical courses from which inspectors can select to meet job needs. From GAO's survey of FAA's inspectors, we estimate that only about half think that they have the technical knowledge needed for their jobs. FAA officials told us that inspectors' negative views stem from their wanting to acquire proficiencies that are not as crucial in a system safety environment. GAO also estimates that 28 percent of inspectors believe that they get the technical training that they request. However, FAA's records show that FAA approves about 90 percent of these requests, and inspectors are making good progress in receiving training. Over half of the inspectors have completed at least 75 percent of technical training that FAA considers essential.

In evaluating courses, FAA continuously assesses technical training through end-of-course evaluations and surveys of inspectors and supervisors. FAA is developing an approach to measure the impact of training on FAA's mission goals, such as reducing accidents. This is a difficult task.

Technical and Other Training Enables FAA to Inspect a Wide Variety of Aircraft

Source: FAA.

United States Government Accountability Office