



Highlights of [GAO-03-317](#), a report to the Ranking Democratic Member, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

## Why GAO Did This Study

The safety of millions of airline passengers depends in part on aviation mechanics—known as A&P mechanics—that are certified to inspect, service, and repair the aircraft's body (airframe) and/or engine (powerplant). FAA establishes the requirements to become certified as an A&P mechanic.

Concerns have been raised in the aviation industry about having a sufficient number of A&P mechanics over the long term. GAO was asked to determine how many aircraft mechanics and service technicians the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects will be employed in 2010, and the reasonableness of that projection; the sources that supply and train A&P mechanics and the likelihood that they will provide a sufficient number through 2010; and what is being done by FAA and the aviation industry to ensure that the skills of A&P mechanics are sufficient to work on technologically advanced aircraft?

## What GAO Recommends

FAA should review the required curriculum at aviation maintenance technician schools, identify courses that do not reflect widely used aircraft technology and materials and either de-emphasize or replace them. Also, FAA should ensure that changes to the required curriculum are reflected on the A&P certification examination.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-317](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-317).

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Gerald L. Dillingham (202) 512-3650 or [dillinghamg@gao.gov](mailto:dillinghamg@gao.gov).

## AVIATION SAFETY

# FAA Needs to Update the Curriculum and Certification Requirements for Aviation Mechanics

## What GAO Found

BLS projects that there will be about 184,000 aircraft mechanics and service technicians employed in the United States in 2010, an increase of 17 percent from the number employed in 2000. We reviewed the methodology and assumptions used by BLS to make the employment projections and found the resulting projection to be reasonable.

A&P mechanics will continue to be supplied and trained by the civilian workforce, the military, and the 175 FAA-approved aviation maintenance technician schools. About 58 percent of the 47,500 A&P mechanics that were certified by FAA between 1996 and 2001 were trained in aviation maintenance in the military or on-the-job, and the remaining 42 percent attended FAA-approved schools. Officials of the major commercial air carriers anticipate a sufficient supply of A&P mechanics from these same sources through 2010, citing their ability to contract out work to repair stations and to adjust wages and benefits to attract the employees that they need. This latter approach is consistent with economic literature on labor markets, which indicates that most employers take such actions to attract and retain needed workers. Eleven of 15 participants on an industry/government panel we convened believe that employers may have difficulty hiring A&P mechanics in 2010. According to officials at major airlines, when such a situation has occurred in the past, their companies responded by raising salaries and improving benefits to attract the mechanics that they needed.

FAA develops the minimum curriculum requirements for A&P mechanics attending aviation maintenance technician schools. However, the curriculum has not changed significantly in over 50 years. Industry officials believe that the curriculum is obsolete geared toward smaller less complex aircraft, and does not provide enough instruction on the materials and technology used on modern aircraft that transports the majority of the flying public.

### Aviation Maintenance Technician at Work



Source: Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association.