



U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Don Young
Chairman

Washington, DC 20515
January 7, 2004

James L. Oberstar
Ranking Democratic Member

Lloyd A. Jones, Chief of Staff
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The Honorable Kenneth Mead
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Transportation
400 Seventh Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Mr. Mead:

There have been some disturbing reports in the media about how some U.S. airlines are relying on aircraft repair stations that have not been "certificated" or licensed by the FAA to maintain their aircraft. It appears that FAA rules and regulations permit this as long as the mechanics maintaining the aircraft are certified and the airline provides oversight.

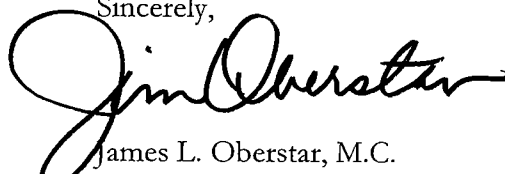
Aircraft repair stations play an important part in maintaining the airworthiness of the U.S. transport fleet, and the use of repair stations is increasing as airlines restructure and reduce costs. The 10 largest U.S. airlines now contract out nearly 50 percent of their maintenance to aircraft repair stations. It is my understanding that FAA has certified 4,600 domestic and 650 foreign repair stations and has a process - now undergoing revisions in response to your July 2003 report—to provide more stringent oversight of this segment of the industry.

Individually certificated mechanics not affiliated with a certificated repair station are not required to have the housing, facilities, equipment and materials required under Part 145 of the Federal Aviation Regulations. Therefore, they do not have the support organization and systems normally found in a certificated facility. I have long been concerned that FAA processes, and inspector workforce, are not sufficient to adequately oversee certificated repair stations let alone individually certificated mechanics not affiliated with a certificated repair station that perform maintenance on the U.S. transport fleet.

Accordingly, I ask that your office review this important matter and provide me with your observations and any recommendations that you might have. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Stacie Soumbeniotis at (202) 225-9161.

With all best wishes.

Sincerely,


James L. Oberstar, M.C.
Ranking Democratic Member