

U. S. Department of Transportation news:



Office of Assistant Secretary for Governmental and Public Affairs

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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY U.S. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION NEIL GOLDSCHMIDT, BEFORE THE BLUE RIBBON PANEL, WASHINGTON, D.C., DECEMBER 19, 1979.

I am pleased to announce today that the Department of Transportation has reached an agreement with the National Academy of Sciences and Dr. Phil Handler for the appointment of a Blue Ribbon Panel to Review the current Federal Aviation Administration procedures for certifying the safety of aircraft design, production and maintenance. Our overall objective in commissioning this work is to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of our existing system and to identify and make any improvements which may be necessary.

The reasons for this review is two-fold. First safety is our primary concern. We need to be certain that our airworthiness system is reliable and dependable. We need to guarantee the flying public that we are doing the work that will assure their safety. Second, we are eager to make sure that the purchasers of airplane equipment know that they are buying safe products. This is particularly true where foreign purchasers of U.S. made equipment is concerned. Airplanes and airplane parts are the second greatest contributor to improving our balance of payments. We must guarantee buyers that this country still produces the safest, most airworthy equipment in the world.

Both FAA Administrator Langhorne Bond and I feel that the time is right for a thorough, independent, qualified review conducted by outside experts to examine our certification system with trained eyes. We want to be able to assure both the flying public and the equipment purchasers that our procedures are sound and we want to improve them where improvements are warranted.

It should be noted that the recent air carrier safety record is excellent. Last year, for example, air carrier miles flown reached a record high, while the accident rate per million miles flown reached a record low. And the total number of air carrier accidents was the lowest in commercial aviation history. But we must always be looking for opportunities to make improvements and we must always be open to outside scrutiny where safety and confidence are concerned.

This, then, will be our effort.

The National Academy will conduct an evaluation of the FAA certification procedures covering the design, production and maintenance of airplanes. Their evaluation will be independent of the FAA and this Department.

The National Academy will appoint a Blue Ribbon Panel of qualified experts to provide direction of that study.

The National Academy will report back with findings in six months. To the extent that needed changes are identified, we will implement them as quickly as possible.

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