

Boeing crisis continues as details of 737 MAX 8 “Dutch roll” accident emerge

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The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) are investigating why a Boeing 737 MAX 8 aircraft went into an unsafe back-and-forth motion, a so-called “Dutch roll,” during a Southwest Airlines flight on May 25.

The pilots were able to regain control of the aircraft and successfully land in Oakland, California. None of the 181 passengers and crew were injured.

A Dutch roll occurs when an aircraft is forced to oscillate on both the plane’s yaw and roll axis simultaneously, with the nose of the aircraft tracing out a figure 8 pattern perpendicular to the direction of flight. It occurs when the stability for flight provided by a plane’s rudder is weakened or compromised.

A preliminary inspection by the FAA showed that the MAX 8 aircraft involved in the incident had damage to the backup power to the rudder, which likely played a key role in triggering the incident. That jetliner has been removed from service and a more complete report on the accident is expected to come out later this month.

The incident is the latest in a series of safety and quality failures on Boeing planes in the past six months, after a door blew out of a 737 MAX 9 mid-flight in January. Fifty people were injured, some seriously. It has since been determined that four door plug bolts designed to prevent such an occurrence had been taken out during an inspection of the plane’s fuselage in the course of production and not reinstalled.

A sampling of other accidents in the past few months include:

- In February, “stuck” rudder pedals during a landing of a 737 MAX jet, possibly caused by loose bolts in the rudder control system
- In March, a fuel leak on a 777-300 was reported

shortly after takeoff and forced an immediate landing

• In April, the engine cover on a 737-800 fell off after take-off and struck a wing flap

• In May, a 767 cargo plane was forced to land without its front landing gear after the gear failed to deploy.

The dangers of flying on Boeing planes have also been highlighted by a deluge of whistleblower complaints since the door blowout in January. Among the most recent was a report by Roy Irvin, a quality investigator at Boeing’s plant in North Charleston, South Carolina from 2011 to 2017. According to the *Guardian*, Irvin alleges he was written up as “insubordinate” for warning management about quality issues that could impact the safety of Boeing’s 787 “Dreamliner” aircraft.

“Missing safety devices on hardware or un-tightened hardware means that you’re not going to be able to control the airplane if those fail,” Irvin said. “The safety device is on there. If the fastener is not secured correctly, it’s going to fall off and you’re not gonna be able to control the airplane.”

Irvin also reportedly knew John “Mitch” Barnett, another whistleblower, who was found dead on March 9. He was in the middle of giving a three-day deposition against Boeing when he failed to appear in court and was found in his rental car with a “self-inflicted wound,” according to the Charleston County coroner.

A family friend has since asserted that Barnett told her, “If anything happens to me, it’s not suicide.”

Another Boeing whistleblower, Sam Salehpour, testified before Congress in April about potential unresolved issues of the 777 and 787 aircraft, all of which could result in the aircraft breaking in half while in flight. Salehpour testified, “Effectively they are putting out defective airplanes.”

Salehpour also told Congress:

I was told to “shut up,” I was sidelined, I received physical threats. My boss said, “I would have killed someone who said what you said in a meeting.”

The hostile work environment at Boeing is also present at Boeing’s main supplier, Spirit AeroSystems. A former quality manager, Santiago Paredes, told CBS News recently, “If quality mattered, I would still be at Spirit.”

He added that he was told to minimize the problems found while inspecting fuselages to be delivered to Boeing, despite the fact that “It was very rare for us to look at a job and not find any defects.”

Paredes also commented on the January door blowout:

Why’d that happen? Because Spirit let go of a defect that they overlooked because of the pressure that they put on the inspectors... I said it was just a matter of time before something bad happened.

The impact on Boeing’s stock has been immense. An estimated \$50 billion has been wiped out from the company’s market cap since January. The stock initially collapsed after the door blowout. It has stayed down over the past several months, rallying for a time only to plunge again as another safety issue emerges.

In March, CEO David Calhoun announced he is stepping down at the end of the year as part of a restructuring of the company’s upper management. In reality, however, nothing will change.

Calhoun was an executive when two MAX 8 jetliners crashed in October 2018 and March 2019, killing in total 346 passengers and crew. Then-CEO Dennis Muilenburg was forced to step down and Calhoun replaced him, initiating a revolving door of corporate heads.

The FAA has also announced that “Boeing reported a voluntary disclosure” of low-quality titanium used on

fuselages supplied by Spirit AeroSystems to both Boeing and its European competitor Airbus. The material was reportedly found after an inspection revealed holes from corrosion. Boeing says it has traced the faulty material through companies in Italy, Turkey and China.

That Boeing claims the faulty titanium is coming from China has special significance in the broader geopolitical context. The expanding war drive of the US political establishment, currently raging against Russia in Ukraine and in Gaza against the entire Palestinian population, is ultimately aimed at China. A claim that a Chinese company undermined the integrity of Boeing aircraft, a key component in the American military-industrial complex, could be used to build up war propaganda against China.



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