

This is an open letter to the light-sport aircraft (LSA) industry to provide a status report on the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) LSA assessment project. The objective of this project is to evaluate the current state of the LSA industry manufacturing and maintenance systems and processes. Randomly selected on-site evaluations are assessing the extent that FAA regulations and ASTM International consensus standards are being implemented. The assessments also include reviews of the manufacturer's analysis and reporting processes, continuous improvement opportunities, and recommendations to enhance LSA safety.

Currently, the assessment teams have visited 23 of 29 randomly selected U.S. facilities. The schedule is on track for completion of the Phase 2 activity (Phase 1 was project planning) that includes both conducting the assessments and collecting data by June 2009. A Phase 3 activity will include data analysis and reporting along with a final report of findings and conclusions by September 2009.

Comments from the FAA evaluators are positive with respect to industry cooperation with the FAA. The evaluators also report that there is a range of understanding of the regulations and standards. The majority of facilities assessed are showing a basic understanding, while a few have a lesser and some a greater understanding of the regulations and standards. Nevertheless, it is evident that there remain areas for improvement for the LSA industry as a whole. In most cases there has been satisfactory implementation of the aircraft manufacturing and maintenance system and processes requirements. However, there have been instances that do not reflect full compliance with the regulations and standards. These issues are being addressed with full cooperation of the manufacturers.

Frank Paskiewicz, Manager, FAA Aircraft Certification Service, Production and Airworthiness Division, provided a briefing of the LAS assessment project at the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) AirVenture 2008. During this briefing he stated that any non-compliance discovered during an assessment, which could lead to possible safety of flight issues, would be investigated fully by the FAA. This situation has occurred during only one assessment thus far. The FAA is following standard procedures, as it would with any manufacturer, to resolve the issue with full cooperation of the manufacturer.

The majority of facility assessments are now complete and the FAA is confident that LSA manufacturer's compliance can match that of the commercial aviation manufacturers. This will be a major accomplishment since using consensus standards and compliance self-declarations is a new way of doing business for the LSA industry. The assessments indicate there is a learning curve ahead and that more educational efforts will improve compliance to the regulations and standards. The assessment also suggest that the FAA, LSA manufacturers, and related associations should work together to continue accomplishment of our mutual safety goals.

The LSA assessment project is meeting the established objective by collecting data and evaluating LSA industry. The data analysis is providing a "snapshot" of the current state of the LSA industry, identifying areas for improvement, and helping to baseline future efforts to assure the LSA industry meets public and FAA safety expectations.