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# **FAA didnt oversee Northwest Airlines as it should have, report says**

In 2008, a Federal Aviation Administration inspector alleged that the FAA wasn't overseeing Northwest Airlines properly, and wasn't making Northwest comply with airworthiness directives.

On Thursday, the U.S. Office of Special Counsel sent President Obama a letter saying that the whistleblower was right.

In its announcement, the OCS said:

The investigation revealed that, despite Northwest's history of AD non-compliance for more than a decade and current trends reflecting an increase in incidents of non-compliance, FAA inspectors continued to work collaboratively with Northwest to resolve deficiencies, allowing the carrier to submit numerous voluntary disclosures of non-compliance, and closing enforcement cases primarily by issuing letters of correction rather than seeking civil penalties.

The report found that these actions were "not adequate," and in many instances were contrary to FAA guidance. The report further concluded that, given that AD non-compliance issues were continuing, the status of Northwest's compliance with more than 1,000 ADs was unknown.

FAA administrator Randy Babbitt subsequently formed an internal team to make sure the reviews and audits were completed, the OCS said. As part of that, the FAA "proposed disciplinary action" against two FAA chief maintenance office managers who handled the Northwest oversight.

The OCS in 2008 referred the complaint from inspector Mark Lund to the U.S. Department of Transportation, which assigned the case to its Office of Inspector General.

This was all happening around the time the FAA was under intense scrutiny because of various whistleblower complaints involving other carriers, including Southwest Airlines and American Airlines.

Under fire, the FAA ordered a national "special emphasis review" to check carriers for compliance with airworthiness directives and the FAA's oversight of the process.

The OIG probe found that during that 2008 review, the FAA office in Minnesota found 14 "instances of non-compliance" at Northwest, the letter to Obama stated:

OIG noted that this number, which was one of the highest of all airlines reviewed, was significantly higher than the eight items of non-compliance identified by NWA CMO [chief maintenance office] over the previous four years.

OIG found that NWA CMO's inability to identify these weaknesses during a safety attribute inspection conducted just one month prior to the national special emphasis review "indicates serious deficiencies in FAA's regular oversight."

It also detailed a number of other failures of oversight by the FAA office overseeing Northwest.

Northwest merged with Delta Air Lines in 2008 and is now under the same operating certificate. Lund alleges that the FAA's oversight of Delta is also inadequate.

For those of you who want to read the original documents, here's a list:

[OSC letter to President Obama, July 22, 2010.](#)

[Press release announcing the findings and letter to the president, July 22, 2010.](#)

[Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood's letter and report from OIG to the Office of Special Council, Dec. 9, 2009.](#)

[Letter from whistleblower Mark Lund to president, U.S. Rep. Jim Oberstar, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and Babbitt, Feb. 16, 2010](#)

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