AVIATION EXPERT: ALLEGIANT 'ACCIDENT WAITING TO HAPPEN'

News / Airlines

Aviation experts are speaking out over repeated Allegiant Air safety concerns, Pinellas County's largest air carrier.

Dozens of Allegiant Air flights have been involved in emergency landings or diversions in recent months, brining accusations the airline is struggling to manage maintenance of its aircraft.

"It's an accident waiting to happen," Brauchle says.

More than 25 incidents have been reported by several media outlets across the country since the beginning of 2015. The majority of them occurred at the St. Petersburg-Clearwater airport.

The latest emergency happened on Thursday night. A plane heading toward Kansas City lost engine power and returned to the St. Petersburg-Clearwater airport.

One of the most severe incident, experts say, was when pilots ran out of fuel and had to stop at a closed airport in North Dakota in July. The Federal Aviation Administration issued a written

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warning to the airline for that incident.

A month earlier, a plane was involved in an emergency that pilots say could have been disastrous. The FAA says improper maintenance on a part by Allegiant's contractor led to the plane lifting from the ground prematurely. Allegiant's contractor was also sanctioned with a warning letter.

Brauchle said the FAA needs to take more serious action.

He explained the agency has a long history of being lenient with sanctions on airlines. He thinks it would take a tragic event before the FAA would take action further than written reprimands.

"I think, unfortunately it's gonna end up being a crash or where you get people that are seriously hurt or even killed," Brauchle said.

In a statement from Allegiant Air, the airline defended its operations.

"Allegiant is a safe airline. We have robust internal and external auditing programs and have invested heavily in new training programs and technologies that are industry leading. Our day-to-day maintenance is performed by Allegiant's team of FAA certified maintenance technicians in accordance with the same regulations and standards as all US air carriers. The FAA is tasked with overseeing all passenger airlines in the US, ensuring that strict safety standards are met. Allegiant, like most commercial carriers, is in nearly daily contact with FAA representatives to share data and ensure the ongoing health of the fleet," the statement reads.

The FAA is standing by its warnings, saying the airline and its maintenance contrator have made changes that satisfies the angency the same issue won't recur.

"The FAA investigates all airline precautionary and abnormal occurrences, and is looking into the recent Allegiant Air events. The FAA evaluates every event in the context of an airline's overall operations to determine whether an event or series of events could indicate a pattern or trend that we need to address," a spokesman wrote.

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