



FAA Union Warns of Staffing Issues at DCA

The Professional Aviation Safety Specialists, AFL-CIO (PASS), which represents over 11,000 Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) employees including airway transportation systems specialists, is calling attention to a serious staffing issue at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA). The staffing levels of airway transportation systems specialists, who are responsible for ensuring the functionality of communications systems, computer systems, navigational aids and power systems vital to safe air travel and the mission of pilots and controllers, is at a critically low level at DCA, and has been so for some time.

“DCA is considered a core airport that services a popular region in an already congested Northeast airspace,” said Luke Drake, PASS regional vice president. “There are currently only a total of 11 systems specialists to maintain all of the National Airspace System (NAS) equipment and services at the airport. Since the airport should be staffed at 21 systems specialists, this means DCA is over 50 percent understaffed.”

In many cases, the work duties of the systems specialist position requires two employees due to the unsafe nature of working on high voltage equipment, in confined spaces, or climbing towers. Due to insufficient staffing, many of these tasks are left uncompleted. In addition, due to staffing shortages, there are only three systems specialists available for coverage in the Radar unit, resulting in numerous days without coverage and employee fatigue from repeated overtime and scheduled shifts. “In other words, the FAA is asking three individuals to perform the vital work of seven employees,” said Drake. “These conditions are simply unsustainable. This is not the proper way to ensure the safety of our aviation system or the employees who maintain it.”

A recent event this summer highlights the importance of maintaining adequate staffing. A July outage within the Environmental unit, which is also not fully staffed and is not staffed on the weekends, was longer than necessary because there was no systems specialist on staff to fix the failed air conditioning unit. The repair was delayed further when a systems specialist had to be called in to deal with the issue.

Unfortunately, staffing of airway transportation systems specialists is not adequate in many areas of the United States. In fact, this week, the Department of Transportation Inspector General (IG) announced that it has initiated an audit on the FAA's process for staffing and placement of systems specialists. The House directed the IG to conduct this audit in the report language accompanying its 2017 Appropriations bill.

“The lack of systems specialists staffing at DCA and across the country has the potential to impact operations, and is without a doubt impacting morale of the employees who are overworked and understaffed,” said Drake. “The systems specialist staffing issue at DCA must be addressed in order to ensure the continued safe and efficient operations at one of our country's leading airports.”



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For more information or questions, please contact Jessica Cigich.