



Second Ground Stop in Chicago Due to Inadequate Technician Staffing

Just days after telling lawmakers about the acute shortage of certified technicians at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), David Spero, national president of the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists, AFL-CIO (PASS), received word this weekend of another ground stop in the Chicago area because of an equipment failure and no technician on site to fix it.

During the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Aviation Subcommittee hearing on Eliminating Bottlenecks: [Examining Opportunities to Recruit, Retain, and Engage Aviation Talent](#), on July 12, President Spero was asked by Rep. Jesús “Chuy” García (D-Ill.) about a ground stop in Chicago earlier this summer that was caused by an issue with a radar system. There was no technician on site with the requisite skills to fix the issue quickly so a brief ground stop was needed until an off-duty technician with that skillset could arrive. President Spero made it clear that the problem would have been resolved immediately if the agency had the right number of people with the right training in place.

“And six weeks later, it has happened again in Chicago,” said Spero. “Just like the earlier incident, the lack of adequate staffing directly led to this incident.” On Sunday, July 14, a ground stop was ordered at O’Hare International Airport at 12:38 pm ET because of a 5 volt-power supply failure in the Airport Surface Detection Equipment, Model X (ASDE-X). According to the FAA, ASDE-X is a surveillance system using radar, multilateration and satellite technology that allows air traffic controllers to track surface movement of aircraft and vehicles. While the failure cleared within seconds, it required technician intervention to return it to service. And there was no ASDE-X certified technician on duty at the time to do so.

“With the number of runway incursions under scrutiny by both the FAA and the National Transportation Safety Board,” said President Spero, “one would hope that this safety critical system would be operational at all times and that an ASDE certified technician would be on each shift to monitor the system. Certified professional technicians keep the National Airspace System running.”

While the ground stop was lifted at 1:33 pm ET, it had ripple effects throughout the Midwest, impacting air traffic in Cleveland, Indianapolis, Kansas City and Minneapolis.

The staffing of certified technicians at O’Hare is inadequate. Although there are eight technicians assigned to the facility, one is an enroute radar technician, three are new employees still being trained and certified, and of the four certified technicians, only three are certified on the ASDE-X. No ASDE-X radar technicians were on duty when the outage occurred.

In 2023, two experienced technicians in Chicago retired about a month apart. “As usual, the FAA did not plan in advance by hiring new employees who could be mentored and assisted in their training before losing nearly 55 years of combined experience,” said President Spero. “The agency knows this is a problem at O’Hare and elsewhere. Had the new technicians been hired in advance



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of their predecessors' departures, they would have been available to cover the schedule and resolve the problem quickly.”

The consequence of insufficient technician staffing manifests in increased restoration times during an equipment outage and more air traffic delays for the American flying public. “Having fewer technicians than needed can result in inadequate shift coverage. This means we do not have the right person available to resolve a crisis when it occurs,” Spero told Congress last week.

As further proof of this point, PASS’s testimony called attention to an analysis performed by the FAA itself that found disturbing connections between the number of FAA technicians and the frequency and duration of corrective maintenance actions.

“The agency has to do better,” said President Spero. “The FAA must collaborate with PASS on staffing models and workforce plans. Our frontline employees know best—as they do in Chicago—how many technicians are required to keep the world’s largest, safest and most complex air traffic control system running efficiently and safely.”