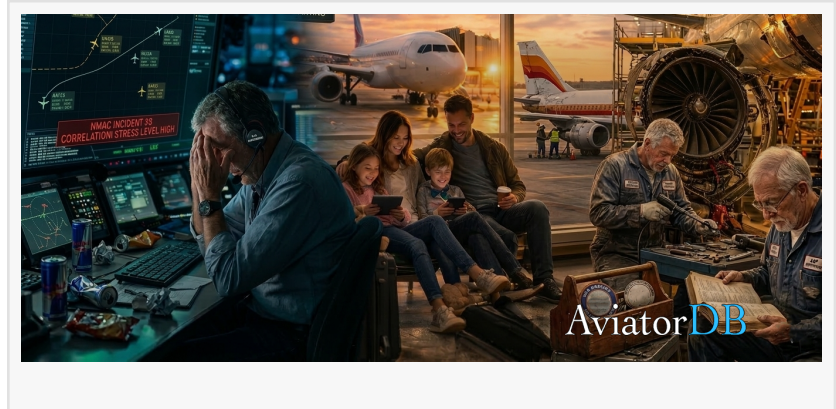


A House of Cards at 30,000 Feet: What 2 Million Safety Records Reveal About U.S. Aviation's Workforce Crisis

AviatorDB Analysis of 2 Million Federal Safety Records Reveals Workforce Crisis at Every Level of U.S. Aviation

CHICAGO, IL, UNITED STATES, March 10, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Independent analysis of 2 million federal aviation records finds every layer of the U.S. aviation safety infrastructure — controllers, mechanics, manufacturers, and regulators — is simultaneously understaffed or degraded.



Flying was, by every measure, the safest it had ever been. The aviation fatality rate hit a historic low in 2023. No U.S. airline passenger had died in a crash in 16 years. Per passenger mile, flying was 1,200 times safer than driving.

“

The story is not that flying is dangerous — the data confirms it is the safest form of transportation — every layer of the system designed to keep it that way is losing the experienced people”

Jim Kerr, President AviatorDB

But the system that built that record is breaking down — the streak ended on January 29, 2025 when 67 people died in the airspace over Reagan National Airport (DCA), in Washington, D.C.

[AviatorDB](#), an aviation data platform, today published an independent comprehensive analysis of U.S. aviation

safety data — cross-referencing 2 million records from three federal databases: the FAA's Service Difficulty Reports (SDRs), the NTSB accident database, and NASA's Aviation Safety Reporting System (ASRS).

The findings reveal a workforce crisis at every level of the aviation safety infrastructure, with a single root cause: there are not enough qualified people to do the work.

Air Traffic Controllers: The FAA employs 16 percent fewer controllers than in 2011, while air

traffic has grown 10 percent. The Government Accountability Office confirmed in December 2025 that 91 percent of U.S. ATC facilities operate below recommended staffing levels. AviatorDB's cross-referencing of controller staffing data against NASA near-miss reports — a correlation no federal agency has formally studied — found that near-mid-air collisions tripled over the same period, from 182 per year to 660. A 2024 academic study estimated that 97 to 99 percent of actual near-miss events go unreported.

Aircraft Mechanics: As of today, 27 percent of FAA-certificated mechanics are over age 64. Eighty percent of the current workforce is projected to retire within five years. The training pipeline produces only 69 percent of the replacements needed, with an estimated 40,000 unfilled positions by 2028. Meanwhile,

airlines outsourced 71 percent of heavy maintenance to foreign contractors — facilities where FAA inspectors found outdated manuals, failed audits, and scrapped parts mixed with usable inventory.

The Aging Fleet: Boeing's 17,000-aircraft backlog means a 10-year wait for new planes. Airlines received roughly half their contractual deliveries after the FAA capped 737 MAX production following the January 2024 door plug blowout. AviatorDB's FAA Service Difficulty Report (SDR) analysis found that corrosion and cracking now account for 41 percent of all maintenance filings. Door defects are up 40 percent. Parts separating from aircraft in flight have doubled since 2017.

The Regulator: The Department of Transportation's Inspector General found that FAA inspectors accepted flawed root cause analyses from American Airlines 92 percent of the time and took more than four years to resolve known maintenance violations at SkyWest Airlines.

"The story is not that flying is dangerous — the data confirms it is still the safest form of transportation in the world," said Jim Kerr, President of AviatorDB. "The story is that every layer of the system designed to keep it that way is losing the experienced people who built that safety record. Controllers, mechanics, pilots, inspectors — they are all stretched thinner than at any point in modern aviation history. The data doesn't show a system that has failed. It shows a system that is running out of margin."

On January 29, 2025, these compounding pressures converged when American Airlines Flight



5342, operated by PSA Airlines, collided with a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter at Reagan National Airport, killing all 67 people aboard both aircraft — the deadliest U.S. air disaster in 24 years. The NTSB's investigation found a single controller handling two positions, a helicopter route left open despite 14 years of documented near-misses, and a collision avoidance system unable to command evasive action due to altitude limitations.

The full data investigation, including methodology, source citations, and interactive data, is available at <https://aviatordb.com/news/industry/house-of-cards>.

About AviatorDB

AviatorDB (aviatordb.com) is an aviation data platform used by plane spotters, researchers, journalists, and aviation enthusiasts worldwide. The platform aggregates and cross-references U.S. and international aviation databases — including FAA registration, NTSB accident records, NASA safety reports, and maintenance filings — covering more than 767,000 aircraft across 200 countries and tracking over 250,000 aircraft positions daily. This analysis was conducted independently and is not affiliated with any government agency, airline, or aircraft manufacturer.

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