International Federation of Air Traffic Safety Electronics Associations

IFATSEA

The Global Voice ofAir Traffic Safety Electronics Personnel

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To : All Affiliates

Re: FAA Ground Stop Highlights the High Cost of Infrastructure Disruptions and the Critical Role of ATSEPs

The nationwide ground stop issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) on November 13, 2026 serves as a stark reminder of both the fragility of critical aviation infrastructure and the immense economic consequences that can result when essential communications systems fail. The disruption, caused by telecommunications issues affecting air traffic control facilities across the United States, led to the suspension of departures nationwide for more than four hours and disrupted more than 10,000 flights, impacting hundreds of thousands of passengers and cargo operations.

While public attention naturally focuses on delayed travelers and canceled flights, the broader financial implications extend far beyond airport terminals. Airlines face substantial costs related to passenger reaccommodation, crew repositioning, aircraft scheduling disruptions, fuel planning, and compensation obligations. Airports experience operational bottlenecks and revenue losses, while cargo operators face supply chain interruptions that ripple across manufacturing, e-commerce, and time-sensitive logistics sectors. The cumulative economic impact of a nationwide aviation disruption can reach hundreds of millions of dollars within a matter of hours.

Events such as this underscore an often-overlooked reality: aviation safety and efficiency rely not only on pilots and air traffic controllers, but also on the technical professionals responsible for maintaining, restoring, and safeguarding the complex systems that enable modern air navigation. Air Traffic Safety Electronics Personnel (ATSEP) are the highly specialized technical experts responsible for communication, navigation, surveillance, automation, network, and information systems that support every phase of flight. When systems experience failures, degradations, or unexpected outages, ATSEP are frequently the first line of technical response. Their expertise enables rapid fault isolation, system restoration, risk mitigation, and coordination with operational stakeholders to ensure that safety is never compromised.

Yet unlike pilots and air traffic controllers, ATSEP in many States are not subject to internationally harmonized licensing or regulatory requirements. Despite working on safety-critical systems whose failure can affect entire national airspace systems, ATSEP are often governed by inconsistent qualification, certification, and competency standards. This regulatory gap creates varying levels of technical oversight across the global aviation system and fails to recognize the safety-critical nature of the profession.

At the same time, some Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSPs) have increasingly outsourced maintenance and technical support functions to external contractors. While such arrangements

may offer short-term economic benefits, they can also reduce the retention of institutional knowledge and operational expertise that are essential during system failures and emergency situations. When critical communications, surveillance, or automation systems fail, the aviation community depends on experienced technical specialists who understand both the technology and the operational environment in which it functions.

As air navigation systems become increasingly interconnected, digitalized, and dependent on advanced communications networks, the demand for highly qualified and continuously trained ATSEP becomes even more critical. Technical failures can no longer be viewed solely as equipment issues; they are operational risks with significant safety, economic, and national infrastructure implications.

The recent FAA ground stop demonstrates that technical failures can have immediate national and international consequences. Every minute of disruption carries a measurable financial impact. Every successful recovery depends on highly skilled technical personnel capable of diagnosing faults, restoring services, and ensuring the continuity of safe operations.

The aviation industry has long recognized the need for licensing, regulatory oversight, and competency standards for pilots and air traffic controllers because their roles directly affect safety. The same principle should apply to ATSEP. Modern aviation depends on increasingly complex systems, and the professionals responsible for maintaining those systems should be recognized, regulated, and trained in accordance with internationally harmonized standards. IFATSEA calls upon governments, regulators, ICAO, ANSPs, and industry stakeholders to strengthen investment in technical workforce development through competency-based training, professional certification, licensing frameworks, and regulatory recognition for ATSEP.

Technology modernization alone cannot guarantee resilience. The safety and continuity of global aviation depend equally on the competence, availability, and professionalism of the people who maintain and restore these critical systems.

Friday's events demonstrate why investment in ATSEP professionalism is not optional. It is essential to maintaining the safety, efficiency, and resilience of the global air navigation system.

In solidarity,

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