MEETING WELCOME

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I would like to welcome you to the Fourth FAA Meeting on Human Factors Issues in Aircraft Maintenance and Inspection.

As in previous meetings, today's topic reflects the concerns and recommendations of the group that participated in earlier meetings. I thank you for this contribution and I thank you for coming. I know you all have many other commitments and that you do not take this amount of time away from your usual schedule easily. Your presence here today demonstrates the importance you place on utilizing a "human factors" perspective in your work. The value of your attending this meeting, which allows you to informally discuss these issues, cannot be overemphasized. Your recommendations and insights will make real contributions to the nature and development of aviation and to the other attendees here as well.

These meetings are structured in a way unlike other meetings you might have attended. They are more than an audience listening to speakers. They are a forum for dialogue among all the participants.

Typically, people come to a meeting like this with some issue, concern, or question they would like to know more about. You might be one of these people. You might hold this issue like a question in your mind and, as you listen to the speakers, you decide whether their message has something to help you answer that question. It's a good way of making an informal meeting like this useful and for obtaining intended results because it leaves a great deal of room for thinking.

You may notice that the exact nature of this question changes or sharpens over time. The question you have now is not quite the same one you had at the last meeting. If this is a productive meeting for you, the question you have in your mind now will be replaced by other questions. You may also have some solutions by the time you return to your home organization.

I sense that the conferences themselves are changing. With each meeting, the quality of discussion that exists here has been deepening. We no longer speak of human factors in vague descriptive terms about each segment of the workplace. Now we can delve more fully into what it is that makes a difference there. We have left the day-to-day type of discussion and entered the realm of vision and determination that is needed if that vision is to become real.

Today, we begin a meeting on the Aviation Maintenance Technician. During the meeting, you can expect to hear discussions ranging from innovations in the recruitment and development of people to the professionalism of aviation maintenance technicians. You may also expect to hear about ways that change can take place on the maintenance floor and the ways that the effectiveness of such a change can be measured. You'll hear about ways a work crew can be supported in particular situations. The important thing here, of course, is not the situation but the innovations we might bring to bear in other, similar, situations.

Since this series of meetings began, the way we do business on a day-to-day basis has changed. We have already expressed concern about the number of people we need and where they will come from. Now, we are seeing and experiencing a real drain from the existing work force as employees become eligible for retirement. The industry will have to look hard to find the people they need. We must be concerned about maintaining employee skill levels and finding and training new employees.

I am certain that there is not an organization represented here today that has not considered strategies for augmenting the productivity level of the aviation maintenance work force. Changing organizations, mergers, new routes, aging aircraft, acquisition of new aircraft, changing products and services -- these are all concerns that affect the maintenance tasks of air carriers. There are also the continuing problems of literacy, longevity, job satisfaction, personnel shortages, and pressure to make gate times.

One of the common themes discussed in the last meeting was the importance of worker participation in many of the functions that had traditionally been closely held by management. It was reported that worker attitude, as measured in participation and absenteeism among other factors, improved as workers took an active role in deciding their own futures. The workforce seems happier and more stable because of it.

These days this can lead to something of a dilemma. How can a manager sustain workforce enthusiasm at the same time he is looking at ways to increase the performance of the work force -- possibly through some less than desirable personnel changes? When times are tight, one of the first things we do is batten down the hatches and reduce expenditures. The task of maintaining workforce performance during anticipated lean economic conditions ahead will test management skills to the fullest. I hope you all learn something here that will help those of you confronting this task deal with it.

So, I invite you to take an active part in this conference. Consider the thoughts and experiences of those here who represent international and non-U.S. carriers. Listen to the ideas and suggestions of people who are not directly involved in aircraft maintenance.

You will be exposed to new ideas here that may be the start in solving one of your current problems. We ask your participation and assistance as we strive for an aviation maintenance system to meet the challenges of the 21st century -- which will surely include times like these, too.