The higher assessment rate is needed to provide sufficient revenue to administer the program for the 1998–99 marketing year as shown in the following table.

	Assessment income	Proposed budget	Difference
Current Rate—$0.0116	$2,296,800	$2,620,274	−$323,474
Proposed Rate—$0.0133	2,633,400	2,620,274	+$13,126

The Board reviewed and unanimously recommended 1998–99 expenditures of $2,620,274 which included increases in administrative and office expenses, and production research salary, and a decrease for a research programs. Prior to arriving at this budget, the Board considered information and recommendations from various sources, such as the Board's Budget and Personnel Committee, the Research Committee, and the Market Development Committee. Alternative expenditure levels were discussed by these groups, based upon the relative value of various research projects to the walnut industry. After a desired expenditure level was determined, the assessment rate of $0.0133 per kernelweight pound of assessable walnuts was determined by dividing the total recommended budget by the quantity of assessable walnuts, estimated at 198,000,000 kernelweight pounds for the 1998–99 marketing year. This is approximately $13,000 above the anticipated expenses, which the Board determined to be acceptable.

A review of historical information and preliminary information pertaining to the upcoming marketing year indicates that the grower price for the 1998–99 season could range between $1.45 and $1.58 per kernelweight pound of walnuts. Therefore, the assessment revenue for the 1998–99 marketing year as a percentage of total grower revenue should be less than one percent.

This action would increase the assessment obligation imposed on handlers. While assessments impose some additional costs on handlers, the costs are minimal and uniform on all handlers. Some of the additional costs may be passed on to producers. However, these costs are offset by the benefits derived by the operation of the marketing order. In addition, the Board's meeting was widely publicized throughout the California walnut industry, and all interested persons were invited to attend the meeting and participate in Board deliberations on all issues. Like all Board meetings, the September 11, 1998, meeting was a public meeting and all entities, both large and small, were able to express views on this issue. Finally, interested persons are invited to submit information on the regulatory and informational impacts of this action on small businesses.

This proposed rule would impose no additional reporting or recordkeeping requirements on either small or large California walnut handlers. As with all Federal marketing order programs, reports and forms are periodically reviewed to reduce information requirements and duplication by industry and public sector agencies.

The Department has not identified any relevant Federal rules that duplicate, overlap, or conflict with this rule.

A 15-day comment period is provided to allow interested persons to respond to this proposed rule. Fifteen days is deemed appropriate because: (1) The Board needs to have sufficient funds to pay its expenses which are incurred on a continuous basis; (2) the 1998–99 marketing year began on August 1, 1998, and the marketing order requires that the rate of assessment for each marketing year apply to all assessable walnuts handled during such marketing year; and (3) handlers are aware of this action which was unanimously recommended by the Board at a public meeting and is similar to other assessment rate actions issued in past years.

List of Subjects in 7 CFR Part 984

Marketing agreements, Nuts, Reporting and recordkeeping requirements, Walnuts.

For the reasons set forth in the preamble, 7 CFR part 984 is proposed to be amended as follows:

PART 984—WALNUTS GROWN IN CALIFORNIA

1. The authority citation for 7 CFR part 984 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 601–674.

2. Section 984.347 is proposed to be revised to read as follows:

§ 984.347 Assessment rate.

On and after August 1, 1998, as assessment rate of $0.0133 per kernelweight pound is established for California merchantable walnuts.

Dated: October 21, 1998.

Larry B. Lace,

Acting Deputy Administrator, Fruit and Vegetable Programs.

[FR Doc. 98–29455 Filed 11–2–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–02–M

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Utilities Service

7 CFR Part 1755

RUS Specification for Telecommunications Conduit

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service, USDA.

ACTION: Proposed rule.

SUMMARY: The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) proposes to amend its regulations on Telecommunications Standards and Specifications for Materials, Equipment, and Construction, by adding a new specification, RUS Specification for Telecommunications Conduit. The specification will provide the relevant engineering and technical requirements for conduit.

DATES: Comments concerning this proposed rule must be received by RUS or be postmarked no later than January 4, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Comments should be mailed to Orren E. Cameron, III, Director, Telecommunications Standards Division, Rural Utilities Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., STOP 1598, Washington, DC 20250–1598. RUS requests an original and three copies of all comments (7 CFR part 1700.4). All comments received will be made available for public inspection at room 2835, South Building, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, STOP 1598 Washington, DC 20250–1598 between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. (7 CFR 1.27(b)).

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Charlie I. Harper, Jr., Chief, Outside Plant Branch, Telecommunications Standards Division, Rural Utilities Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, STOP 1598, Washington, DC 20250–1598, telephone (202) 720–0667.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Executive Order 12866

This proposed rule is exempt from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) review for purposes of Executive Order 12866.

Executive Order 12988

This proposed rule has been reviewed under Executive Order 12988, Civil Justice Reform. RUS has determined that this rule meets the applicable standards provided in section 3 of the Executive Order. In addition, all state and local laws and regulations that are in conflict with this rule will be preempted, no retroactive effort will be given to this rule, and, in accordance with § 212(c) of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 6912(c)), appeal procedures must be exhausted before an action against the Department or its agencies may be initiated.

Regulatory Flexibility Act Certification

The Administrator of RUS has determined that this proposed rule will not have a significant impact on a substantial number of small entities, as defined by the Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. 601 *et seq.*). This proposed rule involves standards and specifications, which may increase the short-term direct costs to the RUS borrower. However, the long-term direct economic costs are reduced through greater durability and lower maintenance cost over time.

Information Collection and Recordkeeping Requirements

The information collection and recordkeeping requirements contained in this proposed rule were approved by OMB pursuant to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35, as amended) under control number 0572–0059. Comments concerning these requirements should be directed to F. Lamont Heppe, Jr., Director, Program Development and Regulatory Analysis, USDA, RUS, Stop 1522, Washington, DC 20250–1522.

National Environmental Policy Act Certification

The Administrator of RUS has determined that this proposed rule will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment as defined by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*). Therefore, this action does not require an environmental impact statement or assessment.

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance

The program described by this proposed rule is listed in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance programs under No. 10.851, Rural Telephone Loans and Loan Guarantees, and No. 10.582, Rural Telephone Bank Loans. This catalog is available on a subscription basis from the Superintendent of Documents, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402.

Executive Order 12372

This proposed rule is excluded from the scope of Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Consultation, which may require consultation with State and local officials. A final rule related notice titled ''Department Programs and Activities Excluded from Executive Order 12372'' (50 FR 47034) determined that RUS and RTB loans and loan guarantees, were not covered by Executive Order 12372.

Unfunded Mandates

This proposed rule contains no federal mandates (under the regulatory provision of Title II of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act) for State, local, and tribal governments or the private sector. Thus this proposed rule is not subject to the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act.

Background

Pursuant to the Rural Electrification Act of 1936, as amended, (7 U.S.C. *et seq.*) (RE Act), RUS makes and guarantees loans to furnish and improve telecommunications in rural areas. As a condition of financing, borrowers are required to follow RUS standards and specifications for the construction of RUS financed facilities.

The specification contains mechanical and environmental requirements, desired design features, and test methods for evaluation of conduit. The test method procedures described in the specification are required to demonstrate the reliability of conduit for use in telecommunications systems.

Conduit is fabricated from rigid and flexible plastic, concrete, or fiberglass. Conduit comes in different sizes and configurations to suit a variety of applications. The purpose of conduit is to provide protection of telecommunications cable and provide ease of installation in restrictive areas.

List of Subjects in 7 CFR Part 1755

Loan programs-telecommunications, Reporting and recordkeeping requirement, Rural areas, Telephone.

For reasons set out in the preamble, RUS proposes to amend Chapter XVII of title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations as follows:

PART 1755—TELECOMMUNICATIONS STANDARDS AND SPECIFICATIONS FOR MATERIALS, EQUIPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION

1. The authority citation for part 1755 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 7 U.S.C. 901 *et seq.*, 1921 *et seq.*, 6941 *et seq.*

2. Section 1755.98 is amended by revising the section heading and by adding the entry 1755.920 to the table in numerical order to read as follows:

§ 1755.98 List of telephone standards and specifications included in this chapter.

* * * * *

Section	Issue date	Title
* * * * * * *		
1755.920	[Effective date of final rule]	RUS Specification for Telecommunications Conduit.

3. Section 1755.920 is added to read as follows:

§ 1755.920 RUS specification for telecommunications conduit.

(a) *Scope.* (1) The purpose of this specification is to inform manufacturers and users of conduit of the engineering and technical requirements that are considered necessary for satisfactory performance in outside plant environments. Included are the relevant mechanical and environmental requirements, desired design features, and test methods for evaluation of conduit.

(2) The various types of conduit materials covered by this specification include rigid plastic, flexible plastic, multi-duct plastic, multi-duct concrete, and fiberglass.

(3) All conduit sold to RUS borrowers for projects involving RUS loan funds under this specification must be

accepted by RUS Technical Standards Committee ''A'' (Telecommunications). For conduit manufactured to this specification, all design changes to an accepted design must be submitted for acceptance. RUS will be the sole authority on what constitutes a design change.

(4) Materials, manufacturing techniques, or conduit designs not specifically addressed by this specification may be allowed if accepted by RUS. Justification for acceptance of modified materials, manufacturing techniques, or conduit designs shall be provided to substantiate product utility and long term stability and endurance.

(5) American Society for Testing and Materials Specifications (ASTM) C 150–97, Standard Specification for Portland Cement; and ASTM F 1173–95, Standard Specification for Thermosetting Resin Fiberglass Pipe and Fittings to be used for Marine Applications, referenced in this section are pending approval of incorporation by reference by the Office of the Federal Register. Copies are available from ASTM, 100 Barr Harbor Drive, W. Conshohocken, Pennsylvania 19428–2959, telephone number (610) 832–9585. Copies of ASTM standards are available for inspection during normal business hours at RUS, room 2843, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250–1598 or at the Office of the Federal Register, 800 North Capitol Street, NW., suite 700, Washington, DC.

(6) National Electrical Manufacturers Association (NEMA) TC–2, Electrical Plastic Tubing (EPT) and Conduit (EPC–40 and EPC–80); NEMA TC–5, Corrugated Polyolefin Coilable Plastic Utilities Duct; NEMA TC–6, PVC and ABS Plastic Utilities Duct for Underground Installation; NEMA TC–7, Smooth-Wall Coilable Polyethylene Electrical Plastic Duct; NEMA TC–8, Extra-Strength PVC Plastic Utilities Duct for Underground Installation; and NEMA TC–10, PVC Plastic Communications Duct and Fittings for Underground Installation, referenced in this section are pending approval of incorporation by reference by the Office of the Federal Register. Copies are available from Global Engineering Documents, 15 Inverness Way East, Englewood CO 80112, telephone number (303) 792–2181. Copies of NEMA standards are available for inspection during normal business hours at RUS, room 2843, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Washington, DC 20250–1598 or at the Office of the Federal Register, 800 North Capitol Street, NW., suite 700, Washington, DC.

(b) *Performance criteria and test procedures for rigid plastic conduit.* (1) Type B, Type C, and Type D round plastic conduit are available in 1 inch (in.) (25 millimeters (mm)), 1½ in. (38 mm), 2 in. (51 mm), 3 in. (76 mm), 3½ in. (89 mm), and 4 in. (102 mm) diameters, and are normally supplied in 20 foot lengths. The three types are as follows:

(i) Type B or Encased Buried (EB) is a thin-wall, round plastic conduit designed to always be encased in concrete;

(ii) Type C or Direct Buried (DB) is a thick wall, round plastic conduit designed to be placed with or without encasement; and

(iii) Type D is a round plastic conduit designed for exposed installation, as on bridges.

(2) Plastic telecommunications duct and fittings shall be made from Polyvinyl-Chloride (PVC) compound or Acrylonitrile-Butadiene-Styrene (ABS) compound. Materials other than PVC or ABS may be used provided that the materials are accepted by RUS prior to their use.

(3) The manufacturer shall specify the sizes of conduit that are to be considered for RUS acceptance (1 in. (25 mm), 1½ in. (38 mm), 2 in. (51 mm), 3 in. (76 mm), 3½ in. (89 mm), and 4 in. (102 mm) diameters).

(4) All plastic telecommunications duct and fittings shall be manufactured and tested in accordance with the specifications listed in Table 1. Test results shall be submitted for all sizes of conduit to be considered for RUS acceptance. Table 1 is as follows:

TABLE 1.—PLASTIC CONDUIT CRITERIA

Type of plastic	Conduit sizes in. (mm)	Performance specification
PVC	1 (25), 1½ (38)	NEMA TC–2 or TC–8.
PVC	2 (51), 3 (76)	NEMA TC–2, TC–6, or TC–8.
PVC	3½ (89), 4 (102)	NEMA TC–2, TC–6, TC–8, or TC–10.
ABS	2 (51), 3 (76), 3½ (89), 4 (102)	NEMA TC–6.

(c) *Performance criteria and test procedures for flexible plastic conduit.* (1) Flexible plastic conduit is available in both smooth wall and corrugated types.

(2) Smoothwall flexible plastic conduit and fittings shall be made from High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE) or Medium-density Polyethylene (MDPE). Corrugated flexible plastic conduit and fittings shall be made from HDPE or Copolymer Polypropylene. Materials other than HDPE, MDPE, or Copolymer Polypropylene may be used provided that the materials are accepted by RUS prior to their use.

(3) The manufacturer shall specify the sizes of conduit that are to be considered for RUS acceptance (1 in. (25 mm), 1½ in. (38 mm), 2 in. (51 mm), 3 in. (76 mm), 3½ in. (89 mm), and 4 in. (102 mm) diameters).

(4) All flexible plastic telecommunications duct and fittings shall be manufactured and tested in accordance with the specifications listed in Table 2. Test results shall be submitted for all sizes of conduit to be considered for RUS acceptance. Table 2 is as follows:

TABLE 2.—FLEXIBLE PLASTIC CONDUIT CRITERIA

Type of flexible conduit	Conduit sizes in. (mm)	Performance specification
Smooth-wall, HDPE and MDPE.	1 (25), 1½ (38), 2 (51), 3 (76), 3½ (89), 4 (102)	NEMA TC–7.
Corrugated, HDPE and Copolymer Polypropylene.	1 (25), 1½ (38), 2 (51), 3 (76), 3½ (89), 4 (102)	NEMA TC–5.

(d) *Performance criteria and test procedures for multi-duct plastic conduit.* (1) Multi-duct plastic conduit usually consists 3, 4, or 6 inner ducts contained within a larger plastic duct.

(2) Multi-duct plastic conduit and fittings shall be made from PVC or HDPE. Materials other than PVC or HDPE may be used provided that the materials are accepted by RUS prior to their use.

(3) The manufacturer shall specify the sizes of conduit and number chambers that are to be considered for RUS acceptance (3, 4, or 6 chambers).

(4) All multi-duct plastic conduit and fittings shall meet the requirements shown in Table 3. Test results showing conformance to these requirements shall be submitted for each size of conduit to be considered for RUS acceptance. Table 3 is as follows:

TABLE 3.—MULTI-DUCT PLASTIC CONDUIT CRITERIA

Material	Performance specification
PVC	NEMA TC–2, TC–6, TC–8, or TC–10.
HDPE	NEMA TC–7.

(e) *Performance criteria and test procedures for multi-duct concrete conduit.* (1) Multi-duct concrete conduit is available in 4, 6, and 9 way configurations with bore sizes of 3½ in. (89 mm) or 4 (102 mm) in. in diameter.

(2) Multi-duct concrete conduit shall consist of a homogeneous mixture of portland cement, aggregates, and water. Portland Cement shall be type I, II, or III conforming to ASTM C150–97, ''Standard Specification for Portland Cement.''

(3) The manufacturer shall specify the sizes of conduit that are to be considered for RUS acceptance (4, 6, or 9 chambers).

(4) *Physical tests.*—(i) *Permeability.* No conduit shall be permeable to water in excess of 38.5 cubic in. (63.1*E+04 cubic mm) per hour as determined in an outside corner chamber of the multi-duct. The test specimens for this test shall be in units of conduit at least 36 in. (914 mm) in nominal length which have been dried at a temperature of approximately 70°F (21°C) for a period of not less than 24 hours. A total of 5 test specimens shall be prepared in this manner. A rubber duct plug or equivalent shall then be used to seal the chamber to be tested. Water at a temperature of approximately 70°F (21°C) shall be poured into the sealed chamber to a height of 34 in. (864 mm) from the sealed end of the chamber. The water level shall not fall more than 2 in. (51 mm) in 30 minutes for each of the tested specimens.

(ii) *Compressive strength.* Compressive strength tests shall be made on a total of 5 specimens of 12 in. (305 mm) in nominal length cut from full length units of conduit but not including any formed end. Specimens shall be air dried at a temperature of approximately 70°F (21°C) for a period of not less than 24 hours immediately prior to the test. Samples shall be tested, 6-duct resting on the wide side, as follows. A suitable container, having interior dimensions of not less than 14 in. (356 mm) in length and 14 in. (356 mm) in width, shall be filled to a depth of not less than 2 in. (51 mm) nor more than 4 in. (102 mm) with dry, tightly packed sand and placed on the lower platen of the testing machine. The test specimen shall be bedded on the sand so that its upper surface is parallel with the crosshead of the test machine. The upper bearing block shall consist of a rigid steel plate 14 in. (356 mm) square and not less than ½ in. (13 mm) thick and shall be positioned so that it overhangs the flat portion of the upper surface of the sample on all sides. A sheet of sponge rubber 1 in. (25 mm) thick and 14 in. (356 mm) square, or equivalent, shall be inserted between the bearing block and the specimen. The load shall then be applied at a uniform rate such that the minimum compressive value set forth in Table 4 is reached in not less than 1 minute. No sample shall fail at a load less than that shown in Table 4. A sample shall be considered to have failed upon the first evidence that cracking has occurred. Table 4 is as follows:

TABLE 4.—MINIMUM BREAKING LOADS

Conduit size	Minimum breaking load (lbs)	
	3½ in. (89 mm) diameter duct	4 in. (102 mm) diameter duct
4–Duct	15,000	11,250
6–Duct	20,000	15,000
9–Duct	20,000	15,000

(f) *Performance criteria and test procedures for epoxy resin fiberglass conduit.* (1) Epoxy Resin Fiberglass conduit is available in 2 in. (51 mm), 3 in. (76 mm), 4 in. (102 mm), and 6 in. (152 mm) bore sizes.

(2) All Epoxy Resin Fiberglass conduit and fittings shall be manufactured and tested in accordance with ASTM F 1173–95, ''Standard Specification for Thermosetting Resin Fiberglass Pipe and Fittings to be used for Marine Applications''. Test results shall be submitted for all sizes of conduit to be considered for RUS acceptance.

(g) *RUS Acceptance Procedure.* (1) The tests described in this specification are required for acceptance of product designs and major modifications of accepted designs. All modifications shall be considered major unless otherwise declared by RUS. These tests are intended to demonstrate the capability of the manufacturer to produce conduit which meets service requirements of RUS Telecommunications borrowers.

(2) For initial acceptance the manufacturer shall:

(i) Certify that the product fully complies with each paragraph of this specification, and submit supporting test data;

(ii) Submit quality assurance data which is representative of several production lots and which demonstrate the reliability of an ongoing quality assurance program;

(iii) Certify whether the product complies with the domestic origin manufacturing provisions of the ''Buy American'' Requirement of the Rural Electrification Act of 1938 (7 U.S.C. 903 note), as amended (the REA ''Buy American'' Provision);

(iv) Submit at least three user testimonials concerning field performance of the product;

(v) Submit product identification information;

(vi) Submit one three inch production sample of each size of conduit to be considered for acceptance;

(vii) Agree to provide plant inspections by RUS; and

(viii) Provide any other nonproprietary data deemed necessary

by the Chief, Outside Plant Branch (Telecommunications).

(3) Requalification of a manufacturer's product shall be required every 2 years after initial acceptance of that product. In order for RUS to consider a manufacturer's request that a product be requalified, the manufacturer shall certify, that the product:

(i) Fully complies with each paragraph of this specification; and

(ii) Does or does not comply with the domestic origin manufacturing provisions of the REA ''Buy American'' provisions. The required certifications shall be dated within 90 days of the submission.

(4) Initial and requalification acceptance requests should be addressed to: Chairman, Technical Standards Committee ''A'' (Telecommunications), Telecommunications Standards Division, Rural Utilities Service, 1400 Independence Ave, SW, STOP 1598, Washington, DC 20250–1598.

Dated: October 23, 1998.

Jill Long Thompson,

Under Secretary, Rural Development.

[FR Doc. 98–29132 Filed 11–2–98; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–15–P

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Aviation Administration

14 CFR Part 39

[Docket No. 97–SW–14–AD]

Airworthiness Directives; Eurocopter France Model SA. 315B, SA. 316B, SA. 316C, SA. 319B, and SE. 3160 Helicopters

AGENCY: Federal Aviation Administration, DOT.

ACTION: Notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM).

SUMMARY: This document proposes the adoption of a new airworthiness directive (AD) that is applicable to Eurocopter France Model SA. 315B, SA. 316B, SA. 316C, SA. 319B, and SE. 3160 helicopters. This proposal would require inspecting the main rotor blade cuff attachment fitting in the area of the main rotor blade (blade) attachment bolts for cracks, and removing and replacing the blade if a crack is found. This proposal is prompted by a report of a crack in a main rotor blade cuff attachment fitting/spar assembly that was discovered during fatigue testing by the manufacturer. The actions specified by the proposed AD are intended to prevent failure of a main rotor blade cuff attachment fitting at a bolt hole location, loss of a main rotor blade, and subsequent loss of control of the helicopter.

DATES: Comments must be received on or before January 4, 1999.

ADDRESSES: Submit comments in triplicate to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Office of the Regional Counsel, Southwest Region, Attention: Rules Docket No. 97–SW–14–AD, 2601 Meacham Blvd., Room 663, Fort Worth, Texas 76137. Comments may be inspected at this location between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Richard Monschke, Aerospace Engineer, FAA, Rotorcraft Directorate, Rotorcraft Standards Staff, 2601 Meacham Blvd., Fort Worth, Texas 76137, telephone (817) 222–5116, fax (817) 222–5961.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Comments Invited

Interested persons are invited to participate in the making of the proposed rule by submitting such written data, views, or arguments as they may desire. Communications should identify the Rules Docket number and be submitted in triplicate to the address specified above. All communications received on or before the closing date for comments, specified above, will be considered before taking action on the proposed rule. The proposals contained in this notice may be changed in light of the comments received.

Comments are specifically invited on the overall regulatory, economic, environmental, and energy aspects of the proposed rule. All comments submitted will be available, both before and after the closing date for comments, in the Rules Docket for examination by interested persons. A report summarizing each FAA-public contact concerned with the substance of this proposal will be filed in the Rules Docket.

Commenters wishing the FAA to acknowledge receipt of their comments submitted in response to this notice must submit a self-addressed, stamped postcard on which the following statement is made: ''Comments to Docket No. 97–SW–14–AD.'' The postcard will be date stamped and returned to the commenter.

Availability of NPRMs

Any person may obtain a copy of this NPRM by submitting a request to the FAA, Office of the Regional Counsel, Southwest Region, Attention: Rules Docket No. 97–SW–14–AD, 2601 Meacham Blvd., Room 663, Fort Worth, Texas 76137.

Discussion

The Direction Generale De L'Aviation Civile (DGAC), which is the airworthiness authority for France, recently notified the FAA that an unsafe condition may exist on Eurocopter France Model SA. 315B, SA. 316B, SA. 316C, SA. 319B, and SE. 3160 helicopters. The DGAC advises that, within 400 operating hours, and thereafter at every 400 operating hours, a crack detection inspection of the main rotor blade cuff attachment fitting in the area of the main rotor blade attachment bolt holes must be performed. The DGAC issued AD 96–081–036(B)R1, applicable to Eurocopter France Model SA. 315B helicopters, and AD 96–082–54(B)R1 applicable to Eurocopter France Model SA. 316B, SA. 316C, SA. 319B, and SE. 3160 helicopters, both dated April 24, 1996, in order to assure the continued airworthiness of these helicopters in France.

These helicopter models are manufactured in France and are type certificated for operation in the United States under the provisions of section 21.29 of the Federal Aviation Regulations (14 CFR 21.29) and the applicable bilateral airworthiness agreement. Pursuant to this bilateral airworthiness agreement, the DGAC has kept the FAA informed of the situation described above. The FAA has examined the findings of the DGAC, reviewed all available information, and determined that AD action is necessary for products of this type design that are certificated for operation in the United States.

Since an unsafe condition has been identified that is likely to exist or develop on other Eurocopter France Model SA. 315B, SA. 316B, SA. 316C, SA. 319B, and SE. 3160 helicopters of the same type design registered in the United States, the proposed AD would require inspecting the attachment fitting in the area of the blade attachment bolt holes for cracks, and removing and replacing any blade in which a crack is found.

The FAA estimates that 83 helicopters of U.S. registry would be affected by this proposed AD, that it would take approximately 2 work hours per helicopter to accomplish the proposed initial inspection and 2 work hours per helicopter for each repetitive inspection, and that the average labor rate is $60 per work hour. Required parts would cost $40,000 per blade, if needed. Based on these figures, the total cost impact of the proposed AD on U.S. operators is