Las Vegas FAA techs say they weren't told about coronavirus exposure
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A union representing FAA technical employees Thursday slammed the FAA for the way it handled an air traffic controller who was diagnosed as a presumptive positive for coronavirus, saying others working in close proximity weren't notified about the case right away.

The FAA shut down the tower at Las Vegas McCarran International Airport, but the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists said their technical employees only "found out about the exposure after the tower at McCarran was evacuated."

The technical employees at the tower found out about the evacuation when a certain type of alarm sounded. An employee contacted the supervisor at another air traffic control facility, "who told the technician not to go into the tower cab because it had been evacuated due to an employee testing positive for COVID-19."

"Other technicians had just finished their shifts without knowing about the positive test results," the union said.

"The FAA told PASS last week that it would be sending all managers a check list indicating which employees may be at risk of exposure," it added. "If the managers at McCarran had this list, why weren't the employees informed and protocols followed?"
"PASS calls on the administrator and all other senior FAA officials to take swift and decisive action to ensure that frontline managers and supervisors have clear, consistent protocols in place that protect all employees at every FAA operational and support facility."
In a statement, the FAA said staff safety is its "top priority" and that it notifies personnel "as quickly as possible about issues that could affect them, always striving to balance timeliness with accuracy."

"We have a team dedicated to answering questions from employees and sharing issues with leadership for quick action. In addition, we deliver information constantly in multiple ways, including emails, messages from leadership, lock screen messages and updates on digital signs," the agency said.

Earlier Thursday, the FAA said in a statement that the Las Vegas TRACON had taken over air traffic control from the McCarran tower. The airport is open, though operations have been reduced. The agency said it was "working to determine how many air traffic controllers will have to self-isolate from being exposed to the controller who tested positive or areas the controller worked in."
Earlier this week, Chicago Midway International Airport's tower closed after several technicians tested positive for the virus. PASS warned in a statement Wednesday that "Midway may be the first, but it most likely won't be the only airport affected" by the coronavirus outbreak.

The FAA said Thursday morning that Midway's tower remains closed, but cleaning there is almost done.

Separately, Rep. Jennifer Wexton (D-Va.) sent a letter to FAA Administrator Steve Dickson Thursday saying she has heard that FAA facilities in her district "are not taking the necessary precautions to minimize risk of the spread of COVID-19."

"Specifically, non-essential employees are not being required to telework, resulting in high numbers of employees continuing to work in close quarters," Wexton wrote.

She added that if an air traffic control tower in the Washington, D.C., area were to close, "the implications for national security would be dire."