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FAA Fires Hundreds of Workers, Sparking Concerns About Air Safety

Staff cuts hit employees who support aviation safety and security operations as agency grapples with recent airplane crashes

By [Andrew Tangel](#) [Follow](#)

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The air-traffic control tower at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport after a midair collision between an Army helicopter and American Airlines regional jet. PHOTO: KAYLA BARTKOWSKI/GETTY IMAGES

Hundreds of Federal Aviation Administration employees were fired over the weekend, fueling worry among government and industry officials over new risks to air safety.

Around 400 FAA probationary workers—those on federal payrolls less than a year—received termination letters in recent days. The dismissals included employees who work in safety-related and technical roles, as well as defense programs, said current and former government and industry officials. Administrative and legal staff were also fired.

Air-traffic controllers and aviation-safety inspectors didn't get pink slips.

The abrupt dismissals have rattled the FAA as it navigates the aftermath of several deadly plane crashes, including one in late January that took 67 lives. They followed employee reductions at other federal agencies in the weeks since President Trump took office.

The FAA employs some 45,000 people and is regarded as the largest civilian operating agency within the federal government. Its air-traffic controllers keep planes at a safe

agency, from the Federal Government to air traffic controllers keep planes at a safe distance in the skies and at airports, while its certification engineers approve Boeing designs and equipment fixes, and its inspectors police the operations of passenger and cargo airlines.

The FAA continues to hire and train air-traffic controllers and safety professionals, including mechanics and others who support them, according to a statement from the Transportation Department, the FAA's parent. "Zero air traffic controllers and critical safety personnel were let go," Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy posted Monday on X.



Pieces of American Airlines Flight 5342 were brought to shore during recovery efforts after the crash in late January. PHOTO: KAYLA BARTKOWSKI/GETTY IMAGES

It couldn't immediately be determined to what extent the firings were tied to Trump ally Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency push to reduce costs and boost productivity across federal agencies.

The firings drew backlash from congressional Democrats and a labor union representing federal workers. Katie Thomson, who served as the Biden administration's deputy FAA chief until January, said the terminations further stress an aviation system that she said is already fragile, old and underresourced.

"The administration's actions are punitive, reckless and dangerous," Thomson said.

The cuts occurred at the Transportation Department, which oversees key parts of businesses run by Musk, such as Tesla and SpaceX.

At his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida on Tuesday, Trump was asked about Musk's work at government agencies and said: "Obviously I will not let there be any conflicts of interest."

Layoff notices sent to employees said that "based on your performance you have not demonstrated that your further employment at the DOT FAA would be in the public interest," according to copies viewed by The Wall Street Journal. The notices were sent from @usfaa.mail.onmicrosoft.com, a nongovernment email domain.

David Spero, national president of the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists labor union, said the dismissed employees provided vital support to the FAA's front-line safety employees.

"They're all safety people as far as we're concerned," Spero said.

The firings hit employees who work on the National Airspace System Defense Programs, a joint operation involving the FAA and the Pentagon. The program has an office in Oklahoma City and maintains and repairs long-range radar used to monitor international civilian flights as well as potential national security threats such as enemy bombers, missiles and spy balloons.

Charles Spitzer-Stadtlander, who worked on the operation, said he was a lead FAA employee working on an upgrade to a Hawaii-based radar system aimed at countering a serious national security threat. Spitzer-Stadtlander, 45 years old, said he learned about the firing after attending a briefing on the project at an Air Force base.

"My first thought was not, 'Oh, I just lost my job.' My first thought was: This is really bad for national security," he said in an interview.

Another former employee at the Oklahoma City office said that the facility was already understaffed and that the terminations could make it harder for the FAA to recruit talent.

The FAA didn't respond to the former workers' comments and referred to the Transportation Department's statement.

Separate from the layoffs, personnel from Musk's SpaceX on Monday visited the FAA's air-traffic command center near Washington, D.C., as well as a facility that oversees air traffic into and out of the nation's capital. The SpaceX engineers are FAA "special government employees" who will focus on modernizing the agency's systems, a Transportation Department spokeswoman said.

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