Atlanta Tower: Major Communications Outage Last Week

WASHINGTON, D.C. – On Thursday, June 8, phone lines for the air traffic control tower flight data system at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, operated by Harris/Raytheon, were offline for five hours, disrupting vital communications and highlighting the growing number of dangerous outages at facilities operated by private contractors, the Professional Airways Systems Specialists (PASS) said today.

Hartsfield-Jackson is the first **Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Telecommunications Infrastructure (FTI)** tower in the country fully built and operated on the Harris/Raytheon network. Air traffic control towers at other airports continue to transition from MCI to Harris/Raytheon systems.

The outage on June 8 lasted from approximately 5:00 – 10:00 a.m. ET. Both the primary and backup systems were out of operation, forcing controllers to use a fax machine to send flight plan information for departing and arriving flights to controllers at the tower.

“The result of the outage was similar to using a computer without a mouse,” said **Dave Spero, PASS regional vice president**. “Despite the outage, only three flights were delayed. Because of the quick thinking and hard work of systems specialists and other air traffic personnel, many more flight delays were avoided.”

Preliminary reports on the cause of the outage suggest that a DS3 line was damaged during unauthorized maintenance being performed by an FTI maintenance contractor (NETCO). A DS3 line is a high-capacity digital circuit that has potentially hundreds of services on it.

Previous loss of radar operations have occurred in Atlanta and throughout the country, mostly caused by the poor transition of service from MCI to Harris/Raytheon.

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PASS represents more than 11,000 employees of the Federal Aviation Administration and the Department of Defense who install, maintain, support and certify air traffic control and national defense equipment, inspect and oversee the commercial and general aviation industries, develop flight procedures and perform quality analyses of the aviation systems. For more information, visit the PASS website at www.passnational.org.