

US FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION (FAA) AIRWORTHINESS DIRECTIVES (AD'S)®

by Dan Pemble, Kissimmee Florida – February 22, 2026

WHAT IS AN AD?

The simplest definition is: A legally-enforceable regulation issued by the FAA to address unsafe conditions in aviation products, ensuring safety across the fleet of civil aircraft.

Because AD's are in fact US laws, compliance is mandatory. There are actually 2 types of AD's: an "Emergency AD" that requires immediate compliance and a "Regular AD" that allows for compliance within a specified time frame.

HOW IS THE NEED FOR AN AD DETERMINED?

ADs usually result from service difficulty reporting by operators or from the results of aircraft accident & incident investigations. They are issued either by the national civil aviation authority of the country of aircraft manufacture or of aircraft registration. When ADs are issued by the country of registration they are almost always coordinated with the civil aviation authority of the country of manufacture to ensure that conflicting ADs are not issued.

Airplane operators are required to submit Service Difficulty Reports (SDR's) to the FAA when potentially-unsafe conditions occur. There is a specific FAA list of such conditions for which reporting is mandatory. Such list includes unsafe landing gear indications, false fire warnings, brake issues, engine failures, smoke in cabin or cockpit, and other specifically-listed items. Generally, operators must report all abnormal events, even if they are not on the FAA list.

During the time I was a McDonnell Douglas/Boeing Field Service Representative (1978-2009), I permanently resided at various foreign locations to support our Customer airlines. Often when AD's were issued, because they were in fact laws and as such were written in legalese, their intent and actions to be taken were confusing and difficult to interpret. Even I sometimes had to read the AD several times to understand its requirements and then I shared my "new-found knowledge" with my Customer! I always felt that there should be more emphasis on the technical content of AD's and far less on the legalese! I guess the FAA finally came to the same realization and I note that they issued **FAA Order 1000.36 - FAA Writing Standards** on March 31, 2003 (cancelled & superseded by 1000.36A on December 21, 2023), Considering their safety implications, hopefully the FAA will now follow their own order and henceforth issue & publish AD's and other documents (FAR's, etc.) that are easily understood by recipients!

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