

Boeing, FedEx trial plane-part RFIDs

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Boeing and FedEx are testing the effectiveness of higher-powered RFID tags as a means of monitoring the condition of an MD-10 air freighter.

The idea is to use Radio Frequency Identification to keep track of a multitude of parts in the aircraft to help carriers get a better handle on their lifespan and manage parts inventories to reduce down time.

"The RFID technology is designed to help airlines reduce ownership costs by managing repairs and tracking assets," said Boeing's Kenneth Porad. "On-airplane use of active RFID technology is setting the stage for wireless sensor networks in the future."

The battery-powered RFID tags created by Identec Solutions contain a 915 Megahertz microchip that is readable at 200 feet, compared to 10 feet by passive tags. They also hold more data and can detect unwanted environmental and electro-magnetic conditions.

If it works as planned, the system will allow ground crews to check the remaining life span of parts without the time-consuming process of opening access panels and making visual inspections. It will also simplify record-keeping workloads.

The 120-day evaluation will involve a total of 50 tags in various areas of the MD-10 that will be monitored by FedEx mechanics when the plane makes scheduled stops in Memphis.

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