

Ethiopian Airlines rejects 'pilot error' claim in US

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Boeing 737 Max 8 planes have been grounded across the world

A US politician who blamed pilot error for contributing to the deadly crash of a Boeing 737 MAX flown by Ethiopian Airlines was "seriously misinformed", the carrier's boss has said.

Republican Sam Graves told a House of Representatives hearing last month that "facts" in investigations after crashes in both Ethiopia and Indonesia "reveal pilot error as a factor in these tragically fatal accidents".

He also said "pilots trained in the United States would have successfully handled the situation" in both incidents.

But in a BBC interview aired Monday, Ethiopian Airlines chief executive Tewolde GebreMariam said criticisms of his crew's actions were "seriously misinformed", and that Graves did not "have the facts in his hands".

"People who've made those comments should ask themselves, 'Why on earth have they grounded 380 airplanes over the world?' The facts speak for themselves," he said.

The 737 MAX 8 is currently grounded worldwide after Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 crashed in March, killing all 157 people onboard and drawing scrutiny to the new Boeing model's anti-stall system.

Pilots were already worried about the safety of the model following the October 2018 crash in Indonesia of a Lion Air 737 MAX 8 that killed 189 people.

Boeing is working to submit a modified version of the aircraft's software and hopes to get the approval of the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and its counterparts around the world.

But aviation regulators meeting last month were unable to determine when the popular jet might again be allowed to fly, causing costly headaches for airlines worldwide.

Revelations of close ties between Boeing and the FAA in testing the MAX led to a crisis of confidence among the public and airline pilots, as well as some of the other agencies that regulate civil aviation.

At the Paris Air Show on Monday, Boeing said sorry for the loss of life in the MAX accidents.

"We want to leave no stone unturned" in the investigations into the anti-stall system, Boeing's head of commercial airplanes Kevin McAllister told journalists.

Critics accuse Boeing of failing to properly test a system that used just one sensor to determine if the 737 was at risk of stalling, and of failing to adequately inform and train pilots on its use.

"Our priority is doing everything to get this plane safely returned to service. It is a pivotal moment for all of us," McAllister added.

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