

F.A.A. Appoints a Panel To Study Safety Charges

By RICHARD WITKIN

Reacting to the barrage of criticism last week of its handling of air safety problems, the Federal Aviation Administration named a panel yesterday to review the charges and propose what "quick action can be taken to correct any deficiencies."

The head of the agency, Alexander P. Butterfield, named Representative Richard M. Shoup to head the panel, and asked for a report back by Jan. 17.

Mr. Shoup, a Montana Republican who was defeated in the November election, has flown as a private pilot and was an originator of the bill providing for restructuring the railroad system in the Northeast. His assistant in the study will be David Thomas, a prominent air-safety consultant, long-time pilot and former deputy administrator of the F.A.A.

Last week, after a nine-month study of air hazards, the House Special Subcommittee on Investigations accused the F.A.A. of "sluggishness which at times approaches an attitude of indifference to public safety."

Pointing to specific cases, the committee said the Federal Aviation Administration had "needlessly and unjustifiably put at risk" thousands of lives by failing to deal properly with dangers of the DC-10 for almost two years leading up to the DC-10 crash outside Paris last March. All 346 persons aboard the jumbo jet were killed in that disaster, the worst in history.

Installation Delay Charged

The subcommittee report also charged the agency with "foot-dragging" in waiting so long before ordering use of a cockpit warning device to prevent the most common type of crash—one in which the crew inadvertently hits a hillside or smashes into the ground short of a runway.

In creating the new panel, Mr. Butterfield was quoted as saying that both the House report and an ABC-TV documentary on the subject had been made with full cooperation of his agency.

"But he also said," his

spokesman added, "that although the recent publicity cast the F.A.A. in a very bad light at times, he nevertheless welcomes such public scrutiny."

In addition to setting up the Shoup panel, Mr. Butterfield said that his agency would speed its review of National Transportation Safety Board recommendations that have been rejected by the F.A.A. over the last two years. The aim will be to see "if any could and should be adopted promptly." This review also has a Jan. 17 deadline.

At least two still-pending safety board recommendations have to do with the DC-10, built by the McDonnell Douglas Corporation.

On Cargo Door Loss

One calls for installation of new pressure-relief vents between the passenger cabin and the aft cargo hold to minimize chances that loss of the cargo door would cause the floor to collapse and damage or destroy vital control cables.

The proposal was made in July, 1972, after a DC-10 lost a door over Windsor, Ont., the floor collapsed, and the plane almost crashed. The sequence of events was duplicated outside Paris last March except that, perhaps because there were six times as many passengers aboard, the floor's collapse doomed the plane.

The plane's builder plans to install sizable relief vents on all DC-10's coming off the line starting late next year. But it says it is not necessary to "retrofit" the more than 160 DC-10's now flying because, with fixes to the cargo door, the planes are as safe as any other airliners.

One of the key recommendations of the House subcommittee was that the F.A.A. explore the need for requiring installation of such vents on all DC-10's as well as on other jumbo jets.

The other safety-board recommendation calls for modification of the rear engine of DC-10's to prevent ice or other foreign objects from producing dangerous breakage of turbine fans.