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Mechanics union files suit against American saying planes were forced into service

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American Airlines is being sued by union mechanics who say they face pressure from company leadership to send out airplanes that haven't been properly inspected or lack needed repairs.

The lawsuit also accuses Fort Worth-based American (Nasdaq: AAL) of threatening union members with arrest or termination if they talk about these issues.

The Transport Workers Union Local 591 filed the lawsuit Thursday in Chicago's U.S. District Court on behalf of the Dallas and Chicago maintenance bases.

The lawsuit was filed by "strong, intelligent and skilled men who are afraid to come to work," said [Lee Seham](#), who filed the lawsuit on behalf of the union.

"They felt they had to make a choice between keeping their jobs and performing illegal maintenance," said Seham, an attorney with Seham, Seham, Meltz & [Peterson](#) LLP in New York. "Safety ought to be an issue of mutual interest. We all should want a safe airline."

In addition to the lawsuit, officials with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) are investigating threats allegedly made by American management to mechanics.

Also, the Federal Aviation Administration has assigned four investigators to look at safety

concerns within the airline. The FAA first interviewed seven mechanics who originally filed the complaint and later expanded it to 30 employees.

The lawsuit was filed on behalf of TWU Local 591 members who say American management is pushing practices that put violate FAA regulations and put their licenses at risk and jeopardize the traveling public.

"Throughout 2014 we have experienced an ugly corporate culture that seems to emphasize pushing planes back into revenue service over all other considerations," according to a letter by Union President [Gary Paterson](#).

That includes:

- A manager encouraging aircraft technicians to resort to maintenance fraud as a means to improve "efficiency"
- Managers and supervisors telling aircraft technicians not to perform lightning strike inspections, despite clear evidence of damage, unless the technician witnessed the lightning strike.
- Supervisors pressuring aviation technicians to disregard federal standards in their remediation of maintenance discrepancies
- Putting technicians who report discrepancies to a "rogue's list" and subjecting them to ongoing discriminatory treatment
- Return of multiple aircraft to revenue service that weren't airworthy

American responded to the suit by releasing a statement.

"We have the highest regard for, and a robust working relationship with, the Federal Aviation Administration," American officials said in a statement. "We continually and consistently work with our regulators so that American's maintenance programs, practices, procedures, and overall compliance and safety are second to none. Our communication with the FAA is ongoing and frequent, and their oversight team has not alerted us to any current critical issues or concerns. As has been, and will always be, the case, we welcome any feedback from the FAA that supports American's unwavering attention and commitment to maintenance and technical operations excellence."

Union officials say American's leadership accused mechanics of attempting to "spread propaganda apparently designed to subvert the FAA investigation." American management told the mechanics that the FAA would target the individuals, not the company.

[Peterson](#) goes on to say American threatened employees with arrest and termination and even attempted to spy on them.

[Peterson](#) said the union has tried to sit down and discuss the problems with leadership but

was met with a "point blank refusal" from the company.

"We feel no joy in litigating against our employer," [Peterson](#) said in his letter. "It is our earnest wish that American Airlines comes to the realization that aviation safety is a matter of mutual interest. The sooner the better. Then we can stop litigating and start talking again."

Seham said he's represented pilots, mechanics and other union groups for 26 years.

Nicholas covers the energy, manufacturing, aviation and transportation beats for the Dallas Business Journal. [Subscribe the Energy Inc. newsletter](#)