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Experimental Aircraft Maintenance

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One item from the last issue of "The Safety Wire" that generated a good amount of feedback was the article comparing amateur-built to experimental light-sport aircraft certification. Several of you wrote in questioning the statement that anyone could perform maintenance and repairs. Many are under the impression that the only person who can perform these functions on an experimental aircraft is the holder of the repairman certificate. This is actually not the case. There is no restriction to who performs maintenance, repair, or modification on an experimental amateur-built aircraft or ELSA.

The path to enlightenment on this issue lies in the verbiage found in FAR 43.1(b), which states:

"(b) This part does not apply to any aircraft for which the FAA has issued an experimental certificate, unless the FAA has previously issued a different kind of airworthiness certificate for that aircraft."

Since both amateur-built and ELSA aircraft have never held a different type of airworthiness certificate, 43.1(b) applies. That means that the entirety of Part 43 does not apply to these aircraft. This being the case, there is no restriction on who performs maintenance or returns the aircraft to service. Maintenance, repair, and even modifications can be performed by anyone regardless of whether or not they hold an FAA certificate of any kind.

The only time a certificate is necessary is when performing the condition inspection each year. This requirement is found in the operating limitations of the aircraft rather than in the regulations themselves. The operating limitations will require that the person performing the condition inspection hold either the repairman certificate for that individual aircraft, or an A&P certificate. The A&P is not required to hold an inspection authorization (IA) in order to perform the condition inspection on an experimental aircraft.