

## **Day in the Life of a Regulatory Inspector**

### **Introduction**

Why on earth should I as a DOM read about an Inspector's daily life? It probably is not as driven or as stressful as mine. They have a good, soft government job and lots of benefits. What can I learn? Hopefully I can demonstrate that having knowledge about what drives the inspector on a daily basis will help you understand where they are coming from when you have to deal with them. Civil Aviation is a heavily regulated industry and your future can depend on how well you manage your relationship with the regulator. It is better to understand what the reasons are for them to act as they do before you have to deal with them after a poor program inspection, audit or enforcement action. So here we go.

### **Technical Backgrounds and Skills**

Understanding the inspector's day requires some background as to who they are. Regulatory inspectors in the maintenance field are usually from an AME or equivalent background depending on which country you live in. Today most new hires come with some sort of management background, many having been directors of maintenance or quality managers, sometimes from production as well. They can be from small maintenance shops to the very large air carrier or repair and overhaul sectors. Once in the agency they are required to complete some serious indoctrination training to fit into a government or quasi-governmental organization. Going forward, they take their speciality training and attend courses in auditing, enforcement, etc. In addition, they still take some aircraft or equipment training, although less today than in the past because of the emphasis on safety management systems training. They are also exposed to a lot of training in writing, presentation skills, human resources, and so on. Working in a larger

government operation can be overwhelming to those who never worked in the military or large corporations. Learning the organizational structure and how the reporting works becomes a key part of their new knowledge base. Not everyone is an inspector, many support staff are also employed, but in this write up we will deal only with the inspectors.

## **The Day**

The majority of an inspector's work falls in a normal work week of Monday to Friday with hours from 0700 to 1730 or so. In the Canadian public service the normal work hours are 7.5 hours not including lunch. This short day also means frequent overtime when things are really cooking. For managers, who are not union members, normally work longer hours which include being on call weekends and overnight. Modern technology means that everyone is somewhat wired into their work.

The day begins with a schedule review, if not already done while commuting, followed by general discussion with colleague inspectors and their team lead. They will find out if any meetings are required, any new assignments or if there are emerging priorities. They may have a day fully booked but then a request comes in from the director's office for a ministerial letter response about a recent audit or news report and its down tools and change direction as such a request is top priority. There could be a meeting with a DOM who has just walked in because he or she has an urgent problem around an aircraft importation. Soon the day becomes much less organized and can quickly turn into firefighting mode. This can be complicated by accidents or incidents, news reports and other unforeseen events. When you include the e-mails and telephone calls from the companies whose oversight they are responsible for the day is soon full. If you are

lucky the inspector might find an hour or so to work on your manual, inspection schedule or MEL.

In addition, he or she may have to deal with human resource issues such as someone becoming ill or reassigned to other urgent work. This along with the internal paperwork, which is now on computers, all takes time. Due to the glass bowl they work in, they need to be diligent in recording all their decisions and record who they met and what for, including details of telephone calls. E-mail communications are all saved automatically in department databases. If you want something preserved forever, email it, but be aware it can be retrieved and provided for freedom of information purposes or court action.

## **Meetings**

Meetings are time consumers in an inspector's day, most of which are necessary. Inspectors call them to get their colleague's input into operational activities. First line supervisors call them to get input and give direction, more senior managers do the same. Other branches such as Human Resources or Finance call them to share new information or to deal with issues in those areas. Since inspectors are submitting claims, entering into contracts and dealing with other humans they can be involved in these sorts of meeting on a frequent basis. You also have the senior manager's meet-and-greet type of meetings, similar to generals visiting the troops from HQ and so on. It's easy to make fun of such meetings but if not held you soon hear about lack of communication from staff and unions. The bottom line is that some of the operational work needs to be done on an overtime basis but that is just the way it is.

One company, a very large aircraft wing manufacturer back in the late seventies, had a policy of having everyone who attended a meeting fill in a form as to whether they were needed at the meeting and the time

taken up by it. It kept meetings small and efficient. Something to think about, as I have seen so much time wasted in meetings.

## **Reporting**

One task that keeps the inspector busy during the day is reporting. Inspectors have to fill in time reporting information on a daily basis concerning what they worked on during that day. Information from this is used to justify and assign resources. They also need to make sure records of any telephone calls are kept as well as making notes to files.

Accidents and incidents do not only happen during normal working hours, so an inspector may be on standby in the off hours and on weekends. Incident and accident details are reported up the line to HQ as they become known. This means that the next day more fully documented reporting is required, another task that keeps inspectors from the routine work of on-going surveillance or approvals.

Adding in operational reporting, which normally takes place on a fixed weekly basis to keep all regions and HQ informed, is further complicated by many time zones. This makes for early days on the west coast and longer days on the east. Across a large continent like North America this creates some interesting challenges at times. Your inspector can be participating in all these activities.

## **Accidents, Incidents and Audits**

In this section, audits include all forms of surveillance. Obviously accidents and incidents happen on random basis and one cannot schedule for them so this really affects the inspector's day. All planned work will be set aside as they gather information for HQs. If the incident is big enough it might even get to the political level. Multiple briefing notes must be prepared for senior political leaders to enable

them to answer the inevitable questions. This happens frequently across the bigger regions.

Unsatisfactory audits and inspections can also ruin the inspector's day. If one of the organizations for which they are the principle inspector is found deficient during any surveillance activity they are held accountable and required to provide input into the follow-up actions. If it gets serious to the point where certificates or licences may be affected by enforcement action, the day can be soon consumed on just one such matter. If an economic generator is affected such as a large air carrier or airport the inspector soon becomes involved in media relations work and other work necessary to keep the political level informed.

### **The Paperwork Monster**

Since all civil aviation organizations around the world are either government organizations or semi-governmental, the paperwork requirements will astound most people who are not in such organizations. Everything, as I indicated earlier, is recorded. This takes a fair slice of time out of a normal day. All trips, expenses accounts, telephone calls, approvals, inspections and so on, as well as internal documents relating to leave and sick time must be completed. Purchasing and any other expenditures require much documentation as well.

Why, you might ask, do we have so much recording? Well to start with, the inspector's daily life is life under scrutiny. Everything can and will be questioned when something goes wrong. After any accident or large incident, regulatory action and documentation, or the lack thereof, becomes a part of the investigation. Heaven help the inspectors if their decisions are not proper and duly recorded. Also, you have the media and legal authorities asking for data and reviewing everything. In

addition, they also need to convince their internal management chain and political masters that things were done correctly and documented.

They must consider all of these things during their work days. You can now see why some things take so much time. Most authorities have tried to delegate a lot of routine work to industry to save time for the industry and to off-load the government departments. This is only partially successful due to political constraints brought on by the public who wish to see oversight accomplished by the government.

When I commenced work in the government in 1975 I found around 20% of a person's time was consumed by internal activities needed to keep the public and bureaucracy satisfied. By the time I left in 2007 I estimated 50% of an inspector's time was consumed. A large part of that increase was created by the freedom of information and privacy laws. These laws placed heavy penalties on anyone releasing the wrong or protected information as I recall up to 14 years in prison. This obviously created the reverse effect from the intended and really increased the workload. We would get requests for all inspection reports for one year or so. Many requests ended when the client was told of the costs associated with the request, however, you can appreciate the work load issue. Another workload issue was caused by the increasing legal world demands. After two major judicial commissions we went to a much more formal enforcement system with an appeal tribunal. No more taking a licence and keeping it in your desk for two weeks, now it was a full press legal system and a great increase in workload. All this was put in place with good intentions and citizen driven or at least politically driven but it all has a workload cost. Unfortunately for all safety regulators governments (taxpayers) could not afford to staff up for all the extra work so the amount of time inspectors had for operational work dropped.

## Summary

I did not write this article to gain sympathy for the inspectors. They are well trained, motivated and well paid. They learn to do things the correct way and to properly document what they have done. They bring their professional aviation skills, training and education with them to the inspector's world. They also want to do good work and take pride in it. As a rule, they get good support from the department, especially on operational matters. Politicians are well aware that safety failures soon lead to public confidence issues and reflect on their credibility as well. The many watchdogs and freedom of information systems also help to make sure it all works well, not to mention again the press and courts.

Reading this and thinking of how often the day can be changed for an inspector will hopefully give you some insight into why your requests or approvals can take so long. You can mitigate this by providing them with early requests and not waiting until Friday afternoon before requesting that an AD be alleviated! Submit your work early, do it accurately and completely, so inspectors do not need to ask for clarification or more information. Follow up on all communications so you do not get lost in their daily struggles. Develop a close relationship and partner up with them to get things done. Appreciate that they really do try to support those who comply with rules.