

Boeing's failure to track foreign workers hurts programs, risks trade violations, says SPEEA



SEATTLE – While building its global supplier network, The Boeing Company is putting delivery schedules and programs at risk by failing to track the number and locations of foreign workers at its U.S. facilities, according to the union representing 21,500 engineers and technical workers at the aerospace giant.

The Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace (SPEEA), IFPTE Local 2001, is uncovering a growing number of mistakes by the inexperienced foreign contractors who work directly for Boeing or a global partner. Union officials said problems with contractors contribute to delays with the 787 and other commercial and defense programs. Union efforts to address the issue with Boeing and track contract labor have been rejected.

“We continue to uncover a pattern of abuse of foreign contract labor at Boeing facilities,” said Ray Goforth, SPEEA executive director. “This is bringing the mistake of outsourcing, which continues to delay the 787, right into Boeing offices and factories.”

In April, SPEEA asked the aerospace and defense giant for information on the process used to renew foreign worker visas and the treatment of the workers while at Boeing.

“Boeing is refusing to tell us how many foreign contractors are being brought here and what programs they are working on,” Goforth said.

Failing to track foreign contractors, particularly at defense contractors like Boeing, puts the company at risk for further violations of International Traffic in Arms (ITAR) rules. In recent years the Department of State assessed Boeing a \$15 million fine and Boeing/Hughes a \$32 million fine for exporting unauthorized defense articles and services to foreign employees. Each is among the largest ITAR fines in history.

To build and maintain the company's global supplier network, Boeing brings foreign workers to the U.S. to learn engineering, technical and manufacturing jobs from existing career workers. Russian workers learn skills and take engineering work back to the Moscow Design Center where more than 1,000 engineers work on Boeing products. Similar work transfers bring contract workers from India's TATA Group and China where Boeing plans to expand production facilities.

Earlier this year SPEEA learned that 300 contractors from Russia were working at Boeing under the B1 (business) visa program. The B1 visa is typically reserved for visitors on business trips. All of the foreign contractors were doing jobs previously performed by U.S. workers.

“Boeing is undermining its own products by arming these workers with high-tech knowledge and skills and then sending them home with work that should be performed by U.S. workers,” Goforth said. “Japan, China and Russia all have large scale efforts to enter the commercial airplane business with skills they learned from Boeing.”

In October, SPEEA begins main table negotiations with Boeing for 21,500 employees in Washington, Kansas, Oregon, Utah and California. A local of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), SPEEA represents 24,700 aerospace professionals at Boeing, Spirit AeroSystems in Wichita, KS, Triumph Composite Systems, Inc. in Spokane, Wash., and at BAE Systems, Inc. in Irving, Texas.

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