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[4910-13-P]

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Federal Aviation Administration

14 CFR Part 39

[Docket No. FAA-2026-4656; Project Identifier MCAI-2026-00214-R; Amendment 39-23520; AD 2026-23-03]

RIN 2120-AA64

Airworthiness Directives; Airbus Helicopters Deutschland GmbH (AHD) Helicopters

AGENCY: Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), DOT.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: The FAA is adopting a new airworthiness directive (AD) for all Airbus Helicopters Deutschland GmbH (AHD) Model EC135P1, EC135P2, EC135P2+, EC135P3, EC135T1, EC135T2, EC135T2+, EC135T3, and EC635T2+ helicopters. This AD was prompted by a report of a separated tail rotor blade (TRB) assembly due to a crack caused by intergranular corrosion. This AD requires repetitively inspecting a certain TRB assembly for cracks and, depending on the results, removing any cracked TRB assembly from service and replacing an affected part as terminating action for the repetitive inspections. This AD also prohibits installing a certain TRB assembly on any helicopter unless certain requirements are met. The FAA is issuing this AD to address the unsafe condition on these products.

DATES: This AD is effective [INSERT DATE 35 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

The Director of the Federal Register approved the incorporation by reference of a certain publication listed in this AD as of [INSERT DATE 35 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

ADDRESSES:

AD Docket: You may examine the AD docket at regulations.gov under Docket No. FAA-2026-4656; or in person at Docket Operations between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays. The AD docket contains this final rule, the mandatory continuing airworthiness information (MCAI), any comments received, and other information. The address for Docket Operations is U.S. Department of Transportation, Docket Operations, M-30, West Building Ground Floor, Room W12-140, 1200 New Jersey Avenue SE, Washington, DC 20590.

Material Incorporated by Reference:

• For European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) material identified in this AD, contact EASA, Konrad-Adenauer-Ufer 3, 50668 Cologne, Germany; phone: +49 221 8999 000; email: ADs@easa.europa.eu; website: easa.europa.eu. You may find the EASA material on the EASA website at ad.easa.europa.eu.

• You may view this material at the FAA, Airworthiness Products Section, Operational Safety Branch, 10101 Hillwood Parkway, Fort Worth, TX 76177. For information on the availability of this material at the FAA, call (817) 222-5110. It is also available at regulations.gov under Docket No. FAA-2026-4656.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Soban Saeed, Aviation Safety Engineer, FAA, 1600 Stewart Avenue, Suite 410, Westbury, NY 11590; phone: (316) 946-4123; email: soban.saeed@faa.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

The FAA issued a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) to amend 14 CFR part 39 by adding an AD that would apply to all AHD Model EC135P1, EC135P2, EC135P2+, EC135P3, EC135T1, EC135T2, EC135T2+, EC135T3, and EC635T2+ helicopters. The NPRM was published in the *Federal Register* on June 29, 2026 (91 FR

39043). The NPRM was prompted by EASA AD 2026-0031, dated February 19, 2026 (EASA AD 2026-0031) (also referred to as the MCAI), issued by EASA, which is the Technical Agent for the Member States of the European Union. The MCAI states an occurrence was reported of increased vibrations of the tail rotor, which was the result of a crack on the TRB assembly. Further investigation revealed that the affected parts may be subject to intergranular corrosion, which could lead to cracks. The MCAI also states that a determination was made by the manufacturer that a previously approved inspection method (Method A), which was in a previously issued MCAI, should be discontinued. Method A consisted of dye-penetrant (with increased temperature) inspection.

In the NPRM, the FAA proposed to require repetitively inspecting a certain TRB assembly for cracks and, depending on the results, removing any cracked TRB assembly from service and replacing an affected part as terminating action for the repetitive inspections. In the NPRM, the FAA also proposed to prohibit installing a certain TRB assembly on any helicopter unless certain requirements are met.

The FAA is issuing this AD to detect and address cracks in the TRB assembly. The unsafe condition, if not addressed, could result in separation of the TRB assembly and reduced control of the helicopter.

You may examine the MCAI in the AD docket at regulations.gov under Docket No. FAA-2026-4656.

Discussion of Final Airworthiness Directive

Comments

The FAA received a comment from one commenter, Metro Aviation, Inc. (Metro). The commenter requested several alternative inspection methods. The following presents the comment received on the NPRM and the FAA's response to the comment.

Request for Alternate Inspection Methods

Metro requested the FAA revise the proposed AD by offering a practical safety-equivalent compliance approach for cases of limited eddy current availability, and an alternate compliance method for the repetitive 20-hour and 30-hour inspections. Metro also requested the FAA consider increasing the repetitive inspection interval for any affected TRB assemblies with documented prior dye penetrant inspection history and with continued Method B accomplishment in accordance with the service bulletin. Additionally, Metro requested the FAA establish an alternative methods of compliance (AMOC) for operators to request relief, based on several factors, such as inspection history and Method B inspection accomplishment. Metro stated the proposed 20-hour and 30-hour repetitive inspection intervals will create significant recurring aircraft out-of-service time for geographically dispersed 14 CFR part 135 Helicopter Air Ambulance (HAA) operations. Metro also stated that these remote 14 CFR part 135 bases have limited availability of qualified eddy current inspection vendors.

The FAA disagrees with the commenter's request based on consultation with EASA and Airbus Helicopters (AH). The FAA reached out to EASA and AH to see if there is any data available to extend the repetitive inspection intervals. AH clarified that the inspection intervals were established based on fatigue tests performed on Fenestron tail rotor blades with artificially introduced corrosion in the critical area. AH's initial intention was to define inspection intervals based on corrosion detection. However, the investigation demonstrated that intergranular corrosion cannot be reliably detected.

Consequently, AH carried out crack propagation tests using the fatigue-tested blades mentioned above. The results of these crack propagation tests were then used to establish the crack inspection intervals. Due to the different load spectra across the various EC135 models, different inspection intervals were defined depending on the model. Although several inspection campaigns have been completed without any cracks

being detected, this service history does not support extending the inspection intervals for affected TRB assemblies that have documented prior dye penetrant inspection history. According to AH's investigation, a crack may still initiate, and the defined inspection intervals are intended to ensure that any crack is detected before blade failure occurs. These investigation results also establish that a 20-hour and 30-hour repetitive inspection is necessary.

The FAA also disagrees with establishing an AMOC for operators to request relief. The FAA does not consider it appropriate to include various provisions in an AD applicable only to individual helicopter qualifications such as inspection history and inspection accomplishment. Once this AD is published, any person may request approval of an AMOC under the provisions of paragraph (k) of this AD. The FAA requested additional information from EASA to respond to this comment and a summary of this discussion can be found in the rulemaking docket at regulations.gov under Docket No. FAA-2026-4656. The FAA did not change this AD as a result of this comment.

Conclusion

These products have been approved by the civil aviation authority of another country and are approved for operation in the United States. Pursuant to the FAA's bilateral agreement with this State of Design Authority, that authority has notified the FAA of the unsafe condition described in the MCAI referenced above. The FAA reviewed the relevant data, considered any comments received, and determined that air safety requires adopting this AD as proposed. Accordingly, the FAA is issuing this AD to address the unsafe condition on these products. Except for minor editorial changes, this AD is adopted as proposed in the NPRM. None of the changes will increase the economic burden on any operator.

Material Incorporated by Reference Under 1 CFR Part 51

The FAA reviewed EASA AD 2026-0031, which specifies procedures for

repetitively inspecting the affected TRB assembly for cracks and, if any crack is detected, replacing the affected TRB assembly with a serviceable part. EASA AD 2026-0031 prohibits installing a certain TRB assembly on any helicopter unless certain requirements are met and specifies that replacing an affected TRB assembly with an eligible TRB assembly that is not an affected part is terminating action for certain repetitive inspections.

This material is reasonably available because the interested parties have access to it through their normal course of business or by the means identified in the ADDRESSES section.

Differences Between this AD and the MCAI

The MCAI applies to Airbus Helicopters Model EC635 P2+, EC635 P3, EC635 T1, and EC635 T3 helicopters, whereas this AD does not because those models do not have an FAA type certificate.

The MCAI specifies inspecting for cracks by performing dye-penetrant inspection, eddy current inspection, or fluorescent penetrant inspection, whereas this AD requires inspection methods under certain scenarios as outlined in the regulatory text of this AD, which are also described in a Note in the regulatory text of this AD.

Costs of Compliance

The FAA estimates that this AD affect 359 helicopters of U.S. registry.

The FAA estimates the following costs to comply with this AD:

Estimated costs

Action	Labor Cost	Parts Cost	Cost per product	Cost on U.S. operators
Inspect one affected TRB assembly (up to 10 per helicopter)	3 work-hours x $85 per hour = $255	$50	Up to $305	Up to $109,495

The FAA estimates the following costs to do any replacements that will be

required based on the results of the inspection. The agency has no way of determining the number of helicopters that might need this replacement:

On-condition costs

Action	Labor Cost	Parts Cost	Cost per product
Replace one TRB assembly (up to 10 per helicopter)	3 work-hours x $85 per hour = $255	$4,900 per TRB assembly	Up to $51,550

Authority for this Rulemaking

Title 49 of the United States Code specifies the FAA's authority to issue rules on aviation safety. Subtitle I, section 106, describes the authority of the FAA Administrator. Subtitle VII: Aviation Programs, describes in more detail the scope of the Agency's authority.

The FAA is issuing this rulemaking under the authority described in Subtitle VII, Part A, Subpart III, Section 44701: General requirements. Under that section, Congress charges the FAA with promoting safe flight of civil aircraft in air commerce by prescribing regulations for practices, methods, and procedures the Administrator finds necessary for safety in air commerce. This regulation is within the scope of that authority because it addresses an unsafe condition that is likely to exist or develop on products identified in this rulemaking action.

Regulatory Findings

This AD will not have federalism implications under Executive Order 13132. This AD will not have a substantial direct effect on the States, on the relationship between the national government and the States, or on the distribution of power and responsibilities among the various levels of government.

For the reasons discussed above, I certify that this AD:

(1) Is not a "significant regulatory action" under Executive Order 12866,

(2) Will not affect intrastate aviation in Alaska, and

(3) Will not have a significant economic impact, positive or negative, on a substantial number of small entities under the criteria of the Regulatory Flexibility Act.

List of Subjects in 14 CFR Part 39

Air transportation, Aircraft, Aviation safety, Incorporation by reference, Safety.

The Amendment

Accordingly, under the authority delegated to me by the Administrator, the FAA amends 14 CFR part 39 as follows:

PART 39 - AIRWORTHINESS DIRECTIVES

1. The authority citation for part 39 continues to read as follows:

Authority: 49 U.S.C. 106(g), 40113, 44701.

§ 39.13 [Amended]

2. The FAA amends § 39.13 by adding the following new airworthiness directive:

2026-23-03 Airbus Helicopters Deutschland GmbH (AHD): Amendment 39-23520; Docket No. FAA-2026-4656; Project Identifier MCAI-2026-00214-R.

(a) Effective Date

This airworthiness directive (AD) is effective [INSERT DATE 35 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER].

(b) Affected ADs

None.

(c) Applicability

This AD applies to all Airbus Helicopters Deutschland GmbH (AHD) Model EC135P1, EC135P2, EC135P2+, EC135P3, EC135T1, EC135T2, EC135T2+, EC135T3, and EC635T2+ helicopters, certificated in any category.

(d) Subject

Joint Aircraft System Component (JASC) Code 6410, Tail Rotor Blades.

(e) Unsafe Condition

This AD was prompted by a report of a separated tail rotor blade (TRB) assembly due to a crack in the TRB assembly caused by intergranular corrosion. The FAA is issuing this AD to detect and address cracks in the TRB assembly. The unsafe condition, if not addressed, could result in separation of the TRB assembly and reduced control of the helicopter.

(f) Compliance

Comply with this AD within the compliance times specified, unless already done.

(g) Requirements

Except as specified in paragraphs (h) and (i) of this AD: Comply with all required actions and compliance times specified in, and in accordance with, European Union Aviation Safety Agency AD 2026-0031, dated February 19, 2026 (EASA AD 2026-0031).

(h) Exceptions to EASA AD 2026-0031

(1) Where EASA AD 2026-0031 refers to its effective date, this AD requires using the effective date of this AD.

(2) Where EASA AD 2026-0031 refers to flight hours, this AD requires using hours time-in-service (TIS).

(3) Where paragraph (1) of EASA AD 2026-0031 specifies "Before an affected part exceeds 1432 FH [flight hours] since first installation on a helicopter", this AD requires replacing that text with "Before an affected part accumulates 1,432 hours TIS since first installation on a helicopter, or within 10 hours TIS after the effective date of this AD, whichever occurs later".

(4) Where paragraph 4.3 of the material referenced in EASA AD 2026-0031 recommends type II visible dye inspections, this AD requires the inspection methods in paragraphs (h)(4)(i), (ii), or (iii) of this AD, as applicable:

(i) If the affected part has previously been inspected using a type II visible dye method, perform type II visible dye (Method B of the material referenced in EASA AD 2026-0031) or eddy current inspections, instead of fluorescent penetrant inspections.

(ii) If the affected part has not previously been inspected using a type II visible dye inspection, perform eddy current or fluorescent penetrant inspections, instead of type II visible dye inspections.

(iii) If you cannot determine whether the affected part has previously been inspected by a type II visible dye method, clean all surfaces to be inspected and perform an eddy current or a fluorescent penetrant inspection, instead of a type II visible dye inspection.

Note 1 to paragraph (h)(4): The FAA reminds operators of the airworthiness concern regarding type II visible dye inspections of critical parts discussed in FAA Special Airworthiness Information Bulletin (SAIB) CE-18-26R1, dated October 30, 2018 (SAIB CE-18-26R1). SAIB CE-18-26R1 explains the risks associated with using type II visible dye inspection methods, including the prohibition in American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) E1417 on the use of type II visible dye penetrant prior to the use of type I fluorescent penetrant on the same surface. SAIB CE-18-26R1 also advises of the importance of pre- and post-inspection cleaning to ensure proper detection of cracks. You can find SAIB CE-18-26R1 at drs.faa.gov.

Note 2 to paragraph (h)(4): The material referenced in EASA AD 2026-0031 identifies a type II visible dye inspection as Method A (not allowed), or Method B; eddy current inspection as Method C; and fluorescent penetrant inspection as Method D.

Note 3 to paragraph (h)(4): When entering compliance with the applicable paragraph of the AD into the helicopter maintenance records, documenting that a type II visible dye inspection was performed improves the accuracy of maintenance records.

(5) This AD does not adopt paragraphs (3) and (7) of EASA AD 2026-0031.

(6) This AD does not adopt the "Remarks" section of EASA AD 2026-0031.

(i) No Reporting or Returning of Parts

Where the material referenced in EASA AD 2026-0031 specifies to submit certain information and to send removed parts to the manufacturer, this AD does not include those actions.

(j) Special Flight Permits

Special flight permits, as described in 14 CFR 21.197 and 21.199, are not allowed.

(k) Alternative Methods of Compliance (AMOCs)

(1) The Manager, International Validation Branch, FAA, has the authority to approve AMOCs for this AD, if requested using the procedures found in 14 CFR 39.19. In accordance with 14 CFR 39.19, send your request to your principal inspector or responsible Flight Standards District Office, as appropriate. If sending information directly to the manager of the International Validation Branch, send it to the attention of the person identified in paragraph (l) of this AD and email to AMOC@faa.gov.

(2) Before using any approved AMOC, notify your appropriate principal inspector, or lacking a principal inspector, the manager of the local flight standards district office/certificate holding district office.

(l) Additional Information

For more information about this AD, contact Soban Saeed, Aviation Safety Engineer, FAA, 1600 Stewart Avenue, Suite 410, Westbury, NY 11590; phone: (316) 946-4123; email: soban.saeed@faa.gov.

(m) Material Incorporated by Reference

(1) The Director of the Federal Register approved the incorporation by reference of the material listed in this paragraph under 5 U.S.C. 552(a) and 1 CFR part 51.

(2) You must use this material as applicable to do the actions required by this AD,

unless the AD specifies otherwise.

(i) European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) AD 2026-0031, dated February 19, 2026.

(ii) [Reserved]

(3) For EASA material identified in this AD, contact EASA, Konrad-Adenauer-Ufer 3, 50668 Cologne, Germany; phone: +49 221 8999 000; email: ADs@easa.europa.eu; website: easa.europa.eu. You may find the EASA material on the EASA website at ad.easa.europa.eu.

(4) You may view this material at the FAA, Airworthiness Products Section, Operational Safety Branch, 10101 Hillwood Parkway, Fort Worth, TX 76177. For information on the availability of this material at the FAA, call (817) 222-5110.

(5) You may view this material at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). For information on the availability of this material at NARA, visit www.archives.gov/federal-register/cfr/ibr-locations or email fr.inspection@nara.gov.

Issued on November 5, 2026.

Steven W. Thompson,
Acting Deputy Director, Compliance & Airworthiness Division,
Aircraft Certification Service.

[FR Doc. 2026-23679 Filed: 11/19/2026 8:45 am; Publication Date: 11/20/2026]