

Update on Federal Scrutiny Continues for Lithium Ion Batteries

June 2013

On April 23 and 24, 2013, the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) held a hearing on the lithium ion battery fire incidents on the Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft. Representatives from Boeing, GS Yuasa, Thales, and the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) participated in the two-day hearing and covered issues relating to certification of the Dreamliner lithium ion battery system, battery charger sub-system, selection criteria, qualification, and safety and aircraft certification process. Presentations and recorded webcast video from the hearing are available on NTSB's website.

The NTSB also held a forum on April 11 and 12, "Lithium Ion Batteries in Transportation." The forum provided the NTSB members an opportunity to meet with and learn from a number of stakeholders. The NTSB members were particularly interested in learning about failure rates of lithium ion cells and batteries, the definition of thermal runaway, how standards are developed, who participates in and chairs the industry standards' committees, what type of performance testing is conducted on lithium ion cells and batteries, safety designs for various lithium ion battery applications, and whether additional safety tests are being developed.

Also at the forum, the FAA updated the NTSB on the lithium ion and lithium metal cell flammability tests being conducted by the FAA Technical Center. The FAA's presentation included a video of their recent fire tests on 5,000 lithium ion cells. The FAA noted that the agency recently published a study and model that addresses the potential fire threat from all forms of cargo, including the bulk shipment of lithium batteries.

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Prior to issuing its recommendations on the Dreamliner investigation, the NTSB is planning to visit GS Yuasa's lithium ion cell and battery manufacturing facility in Japan.