

SQUAWK

EASA issues emergency directive: solar radiation corrupted flight-control data on Airbus A320 aircraft

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The European Union Aviation Safety Agency has issued an emergency directive requiring all Airbus A320 operators to immediately update the flight-control software and replace a critical hardware module after it was determined that a powerful burst of solar radiation affected computer data on at least one aircraft. The directive follows an incident in which an A320 briefly pitched down without pilot input, despite the autopilot remaining engaged. The manoeuvre was short, and the flight continued without further issues, but the analysis revealed a combination of a software anomaly and a potential malfunction of the ELAC B L104 module, which controls key flight-control surfaces.

Airbus has confirmed that the root of the problem may be linked to an unusually intense solar-radiation event that interfered with data essential for the operation of the flight-control system. The manufacturer explained that this rare radiation spike, essentially a strong energy wave from the Sun, temporarily corrupted flight-control data. Airbus has also identified that the issue could affect a significant number of in-service A320 Family aircraft and has proactively issued an Alert Operators Transmission requesting immediate precautionary action.

In its statement, Airbus noted that the combination of corrupted data and the vulnerable ELAC hardware could—in an extreme scenario—lead to uncommanded elevator movement, potentially exceeding structural limits. As a precaution, operators are required to install a software protection update and replace the affected ELAC B L104 module with the serviceable ELAC B L103+ version. Airbus acknowledged that these measures will likely cause operational disruption for airlines and passengers, apologising for the inconvenience while emphasising that safety remains the top priority.

Regulators are clear that aircraft cannot return to service until the required corrections are completed. Only short ferry flights without passengers—up to three flight cycles—are permitted to reposition an aircraft to a maintenance location. Since Airbus is a European manufacturer, EASA issued the initial order, but the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration is expected to publish its own corresponding directive shortly, following standard procedure.

While such events are extremely rare, the combination of heightened solar activity and the vulnerability of specific flight-control components has reminded the industry of how sensitive these systems can be to extreme conditions encountered at cruise altitudes. The swift response from both regulators and the manufacturer demonstrates the aviation sector's uncompromising approach to safety and ensures that the A320 Family fleet can return to normal operations once the required upgrades and replacements are completed.

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