Boeing 787 update

The Associated Press

TAKAMATSU, Japan, Jan. 16 (Kyodo) — A Boeing 787 Dreamliner jet operated by All Nippon Airways Co. made an emergency landing Wednesday morning at Takamatsu Airport in western Japan due to smoke in the cockpit, with the transport ministry suspecting a problem related to the aircraft's main battery may have caused the incident.

As the incident came on the heels of a series of problems involving the new Boeing model, ANA, which was the first carrier to introduce the fuel-efficient aircraft in November 2011, said it will suspend operation of its fleet of 17 Dreamliners for inspections.

ANA said after an inspection of the troubled aircraft that electrolyte leakage had been found around the aircraft's main battery, housed in an electronic equipment room beneath the cockpit.

Japanese battery maker GS Yuasa Corp., which provides lithium-ion batteries for all 787 aircraft, said the cause of the problems remains to be identified and it is gathering information on the matter.

Shortly after the plane took off from Yamaguchi Ube Airport in western Japan for Haneda airport in Tokyo at around 8:10 a.m. Wednesday, a device in the cockpit indicated battery problems as the plane was flying at an altitude of around 9,000 meters, ANA officials said, adding that one of the pilots smelled an abnormal odor.

All 137 aboard the domestic flight evacuated from the plane. Two of the 129 passengers were slightly injured when they evacuated using emergency chutes, ANA said.

The Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Ministry has dispatched three officials to the airport in Kagawa Prefecture and started a full-fledged investigation, saying it views Wednesday's occurrence as a serious incident that could have led to an accident.

The ministry-affiliated Japan Transport Safety Board also dispatched five inspectors, while GS Yuasa also said it will send three company employees to investigate on Thursday at the request of the transport ministry.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration said the incident will be subject to its comprehensive review of the 787's electrical system, according to Reuters.

ANA flight 692 landed at Takamatsu Airport around 8:45 a.m. after smoke was detected inside the aircraft, according to ANA officials and local authorities.

Takamatsu Airport officials said that prior to the emergency landing, the pilot notified the airport's office that the cockpit had begun reeking of smoke.

A 40-year-old man who was aboard the flight said he began to smell an odor after drinks were served, while another passenger said smoke filled the plane when the escape chutes were deployed and some people were injured as they could not land properly after sliding down the chutes.

Boeing Co. on Tuesday issued a statement that it is trying to determine the cause of the problem together with ANA and authorities concerned.

Other recent problems involving Boeing 787 aircraft, which are equipped with many electronic devices and consume more electricity compared with conventional aircraft, include a fuel leak from one operated by Japan Airlines Co. and a small electrical fire on another JAL Dreamliner, both at Boston's Logan International Airport earlier this month.

After Wednesday's incident, ANA said it will immediately suspend operation of its Dreamliners until their safety can be confirmed. JAL also said it will ground its seven Boeing 787s for the time being to conduct emergency checks.

ANA President Shinichiro Ito met with transport minister Akihiro Ota on Wednesday and apologized for the incident.

United Airlines also possesses 787s, but the carrier does not plan to halt operation of the aircraft for now, it said.

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