

What is an SB?

SB is the quick way to say Service Bulletin. Service bulletins are notices to aircraft operators from a manufacturer notifying them of a product improvement. Alert service bulletins are issued by the manufacturer when a condition exists that the manufacturer feels is a safety related item as opposed to just a product improvement.

Because there are different levels of importance for service bulletins, there has been a move towards further modifying them into categories. These would be alert (mentioned above), recommended, informational, and mandatory. It seems that mandatory service bulletins and airworthiness directives are redundant.

Some say that a service bulletin is completely voluntary unless attached to an airworthiness directive. However, an NTSB decision rules that an SB can be made mandatory if a manufacturer makes it so in their overhaul or maintenance manual by reference. If they say it must be done for a good overhaul, repair or for continued airworthiness then the AD attachment is not required. Likewise, if the aircraft is operated under Part 14, Part 121, or Part 135 air carrier ops, it MAY be considered mandatory.

A Service Bulletin reflects that the improvements made to a component on an aircraft are serious enough to be worthy of consideration. Many owners think that an SB means a better, safer component has been developed and they may opt to do the work. In most cases an owner should do a cost analysis, including down time, of changing out a component that is still functioning. It is not necessarily true that a new and improved product makes the aircraft more airworthy.

A SB does not require an owner to do anything if his aircraft is flown privately. Many owners will have their mechanic look at the described problem and take note of the situation but do nothing. The owner may also have the mechanic go ahead and comply with the SB simply because it could be a maintenance problem in the future or he expects it to mature into a full blown airworthiness directive. In this case it is a preventative measure and always considered good maintenance practice.