$2M federal support means more jobs at AeroMechanical

Calgary-based firm upgrades black box technology

BY DINA O'MEARA, CALGARY HERALD FEBRUARY 24, 2011

Bill Tempany, left, CEO of AeroMechanical Service Ltd., and Rob Merrifield, minister of state for transportation, celebrate the announcement of a government investment in the research and development of next-generation data communication systems for commercial and military aircraft.

Photograph by: Stuart Gradon, Calgary Herald

AeroMechanical Services Ltd. will be hiring more staff to bring its unique emergency data technology to the fore after receiving a $2-million investment from the federal government.

The Calgary-based company has gained international recognition for its automated flight information reporting system, AFIRS, that enables aircraft to stream critical data real-time to ground crews.

AeroMechanical's newest development upgrades the product by integrating an aircraft's safety-related and non-safety services, noted Rob Merrifield, minister of state for transportation, on Wednesday.

"Through the Strategic Aerospace and Defence Initiative, the government of Canada is making an investment of $1.96 million in this exciting research and development program at AMS," Merrifield said.

"We are world leaders in this technology, this is the only place where this technology is happening, we should be proud."

The Canadian aerospace industry contributes $22 billion in sales a year to the economy, and places fifth in world rankings, he said.

The technology is a vast improvement over traditional black boxes because of the immediate transmission of information while an airplane is in flight, said chief executive Bill Tempany.

"We've been working 13 years creating the product that we believe will change how people manage aircraft, maintenance of those aircraft, and in the worse-case scenario, find the aircraft if there is an incident," Tempany said Wednesday.

Investigators still have not recovered the black box of the ill-fated Air France flight 447 which crashed off the coast of Brazil in 2009, and do not know what led to the incident, which killed 228 people.

"There are several hundred parameters streaming through each aircraft each second," explained Kent Jacobs, AMS technical director.

"This gives investigation boards the full ability to analyze what the flight crew was seeing, how they were performing, and what led to an accident or an incident."

The federal repayable investment will be used to hire 14 more people who will complement a team leading the upgrade to meet new certification requirements on commercial aircraft, Tempany said.

Current AFIRS technology offers real-time capabilities for fleet management, fuel and emissions reduction, flight following and flexible communications capacities.

domeara@calgaryherald.com