

# **Unsettled Issues Regarding the Certification of Electric Aircraft**

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## About the Editors



**Dr. Ravi Rajamani** is an independent consultant working on applying model-based and data analytics techniques to aerospace and other complex systems, especially in the areas of controls, prognostics and health management, and all forms of propulsion. He has published six books including *Electric Flight Technology: The Unfolding of a New Future*. In addition, Dr. Rajamani is the author of many book chapters, journal papers, conference proceedings, and patents. Prior to his current job, he worked at Meggitt, United Technologies Corporation, and General Electric. He has a PhD from the University of Minnesota; an MBA from the University of Connecticut; an MSc from the India Institute of Science, Bangalore; and a BTech from India Institute of Technology, Delhi. He is active within various SAE technical committees and serves as the chair of the Integrated Vehicle Health Management Steering Group. He currently serves as the Editor in Chief of the *SAE International Journal of Aerospace* and is part of the editorial board of two other journals. He has visiting research positions at the University of Connecticut and at Cranfield University.



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# contents

About the Editors		
Unsettled Issues Regarding the Certification of Electric Aircraft	3	
Introduction	4	
Aircraft Certification	5	
Existing Certification Constructs	6	
Applicable Regulations and Relevant Perspectives	7	
Applicable Regulations across the Globe	8	
FAA and EASA	8	
Others	9	
Relevant Perspectives	10	
Industry: Manufacturers	10	
Industry: Operators and Maintainers	11	
Industry: Infrastructure	11	
Pilots (and Autonomy)	12	
Public: Traveling and Nonparticipants	12	
Regulators	12	
Standards Development Organizations	13	
Airlines for America/Maintenance Programs Industry Group	13	
ASTM International	14	
EUROCAE	14	
IMRBPB	14	
RTCA	14	
SAE/ARINC	14	
Other SDOs	15	
Recommendations	15	
Certification Challenges	16	
Areas of Maturity	17	
Needs	18	
Ongoing Efforts	19	
Critical Next Steps	20	
Propulsion Battery Certification Standards	21	
Battery Chemistries	21	
Lithium Battery Design, Performance, and Testing Standards	21	
Battery Charging Standards	22	
Motors and Generators	23	
Distributed Electric Propulsion	24	
Electric Actuation	25	
Fuel Reserves	25	
Different Aircraft Architectures and Issues Regarding Certification	27	
Recommendations	29	
Process Level	29	
Aircraft Level	30	
Systems Level	30	
Operational	31	
Summary	31	
SAE EDGE Research Reports	31	
Next Steps for EA Certification	31	
Recommendations	32	
Abbreviations/Definitions	33	
Acknowledgments	34	
References	34	
Contact Information	34	

# Unsettled Issues Regarding the Certification of Electric Aircraft

## Abstract

The aerospace industry has begun to grapple with the reality of certifying electric aircraft (EA), signaling the maturing of the field. Many industry players are ramping up their activities to respond to imminent technical, safety, and regulatory challenges. In the forefront, manufacturers are working on new designs and innovative propulsion architectures for conventional and novel aircraft. While there are gaps in the understanding of the requirements as well as the processes for certification of these aircraft, some leading standards development organizations (SDOs) such as SAE International, ASTM International, and RTCA are stepping in to address many of these issues—ably supported by representatives from regulatory agencies. These SDOs have representatives from aircraft and engine manufacturers, operators, and major suppliers. Even with active help from these experts, the dust has not yet settled on all the rules and regulations that will guide the applicants in their quest for type certification. We believe this report is coming at an appropriate juncture in time to discuss the certification challenges faced by EA manufacturers in both the small (normal) and large (transport) categories. It will not cover autonomous vehicles, even though there is a tendency to conflate electric propulsion with autonomy. Autonomous flight is a rich topic that can best be served with a report dedicated to that topic alone.

The recommendations coming out of this document address technical, business, and process issues related to the certification of EA. Of special importance are the new rule changes in the normal category (Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations [14 CFR] Part 23, Amendment 64) that shift from a prescriptive philosophy to what is known as performance-based rules (PBRs); we will discuss how they affect the EA sector. In recent times, there has been a trend in the aviation sector of using electrical energy to power systems that have long used mechanical means such as hydraulics. But in EA, these components will be employed at criticality levels not previously witnessed in conventional aircraft. These components include motors, battery systems, actuators, auxiliary power units (APUs), and generators, among others. This report discusses many of the open issues with respect to certification of components and systems with the hope that the various stakeholders involved in this endeavor take note as they continue to move forward. We believe that with the first light-sport category EA certified in Europe in the summer of 2020, this is the right time to discuss some of the open issues regarding certification at all levels. The pace is only going to accelerate as other applicants present their various designs to the regulators and seek type certificates.

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