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The Human Factor

Airport chaplains coordinate efforts to provide spiritual, moral, physical and material assistance to those affected by aviation emergencies.

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by

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This article is based upon a paper presented during the 11th Annual Combined Emergency Services Seminar held at Latrobe University, Bundoora, Victoria, Australia, November 25-26, 1989. Each paper responded to a scenario in which a fictitious air carrier aircraft had taken off from Melbourne Airport with 132 persons on board, bound for an overseas destination via Sydney. Several minutes into the 70-minute leg to Sydney a bomb explodes in the forward cargo compartment and the aircraft crashes. Most of the occupants are killed and the survivors are severely burned. The authors addressed human factors aspects of the disaster from their viewpoint as providing support to the victims through Melbourne's Airport Emergency Procedures-Human Recovery (AEP-HR) plan.

Aviation emergency incidents greatly affect the involved persons physically, emotionally, spiritually, materially and psychologically. Emergency personnel have developed techniques over the years to handle these situations more effectively and efficiently, and to help those affected to recover more quickly.

What is the Human Factor?

Human beings have emotional reactions to events, and this is what we refer to as "the human factor." The feel-

ings of all emergency affected persons is what makes them different from the material things such as the aircraft or its cargo. It is to aid the human factor, as well as for survival, that we develop most of our scientific and technological skills.

In discussing emergencies, holding conferences and conducting exercises, we often deal theoretically with material matters and often neglect to make allowances for the human reactions of passengers, crew, emergency personnel and other affected persons such as relatives and on-lookers. Skills that most emergency workers develop and utilize are functional and mostly of a practical nature, such as attending to physical and material matters. However, the emotional factor will be in need of attention long after many of the material matters have been dealt with.

At Melbourne Airport, we refer to "human recovery" rather than "welfare" as this more adequately describes our activities in relation to emergencies. Welfare usually refers to basic essentials of food, clothing and shelter. Human recovery deals with the restoration of healthy relationships and as near to normal a lifestyle as possible, bearing in mind that after such events individuals rarely are the same again. We try in our programs to not use the terms "disaster" or "victim" any longer, preferring to use "emergency" and "emergency affected person."

Who Are Affected?

The spectrum of human beings who are directly or indirectly affected by an emergency includes:

- *Passengers, crew and others at the point of impact.* These we refer to as the emergency affected persons. Passengers who survive an emergency or incident are often disoriented, shocked and injured. Crew members who continue to fulfill their tasks until relieved by other emergency personnel, often fall victim to emotional reactions after they are relieved.

- *Nearby residents, local workers and witnesses.* Persons who live or work nearby will be affected both by the horror of the scene and by what might have happened to them. It is not unusual for them to suffer compensatory guilt feelings.

Housing, workplaces or farmland may have been destroyed or damaged which may have lasting effects on the lifestyles of the community.

- *Emergency personnel.* Specialists and aviation personnel, including an airport chaplain, would be on the site as soon as practicable. In Australia these could include the traditional firefighters (CFA), ambulance personnel, police and workers from State Emergency Services (SES). Local and regional hospitals would be involved, as well as municipal council workers and various community volunteers.

- *Relatives and friends.* This group of affected persons will be the most difficult to locate and counsel.

Many people would be in the vicinity of the departure airport when they became aware of the incident. Others would be waiting at various points of arrival for the flight. Some relatives and friends might attempt to travel to the crash site and be met with the frustration of not being allowed on the scene for safety or security reasons. They may flood local hospitals seeking information which may not be available.

- *Aviation workers.* Aviation people generally, but at the point of departure in particular, are affected by such an incident.

Security personnel ask questions about the adequacy of the systems or whether they made a mistake. They wonder if they helped load the bomb.

Baggage handlers and ticketers wonder if they too

may have loaded a bomb, and suffer irrational guilt about it or fears that it could have exploded when they were handling it.

The air traffic controllers who were tracking the aircraft when it suddenly disappeared from the radar screen, perhaps without a mayday call, may question their responses.

Technical and cabin crew who changed rosters or missed the fatal flight suffer reactions including relief, guilt and anger.

The Human Recovery Plan

The Airport Emergency Procedures — Human Recovery (AEP-HR) Plan is activated in airport emergencies of all kinds, or what might be referred to as “on-site” situations. In an off-site situation, the AEP-HR Plan would be adapted to conform to the controlling agency’s emergency plan which would be in force. The airline fulfills its obligation to its passengers which extends to providing emergency essentials such as food and shelter. It is in the area of interface concerning passengers that emergency plan and airline personnel would need to have an understanding of each others’ operation.

The following extracts illustrate the purpose and structure of the Australian AEP-HR Plan for airport activity:

- *Introduction.* Human recovery implies the care of emergency affected persons and will provide spiritual, moral, physical and material assistance as required. It also applies to the provision of ongoing care for emergency workers.

This human recovery plan is designed to support all those involved in an aviation emergency whether as passengers, crew, relief workers or relatives and friends of passengers. It is based on the Victorian State “Displan” (disaster plan) for emergency relief with appropriate modifications to suit the particular situations arising. A human recovery coordinator ensures that provision is made for welfare and social service organizations to carry out emergency functions through their normal organizations.

The primary responsibility for preparedness in airport emergencies rests with the Federal Airports Corporation and the airline operators concerned, but it is essential that this be reinforced by community welfare organizations that are allotted specific tasks during such emergencies.

- *Objectives.* The objectives of this human recovery plan are:

To provide a prompt and efficient human service to persons affected or threatened by an aviation emergency.

To provide an advisory role to non-airport organizations on welfare matters and to assist aviation organizations to integrate their plans into the AEP-HR Plan.

To establish working principles for the coordination of emergency assistance and relief measures to be carried out by the various human services agencies, and by professional and business organizations.

- *Human Recovery Subcommittee.* The subcommittee to implement this human recovery plan is formed of the following:

Chairman. The human recovery coordinator, who is an airport chaplain, chairs all meetings of the Human Recovery Subcommittee.

Membership. The following companies and organizations are represented on the Human Recovery Subcommittee and serve as examples of the type of organizations that would participate when an aviation emergency occurs: Ansett Airlines of Australia, Australian Airlines, Qantas Airways Limited, Victoria Police, Victoria State Emergency Service, Community Services Victoria (CSV), Australian Red Cross Society (ACRS), Salvation Army, Airport Chaplain(s) and ITIM (Interchurch and Industrial Mission, an industrial mission service operating throughout Australia on behalf of the major churches.)

- *Operational Responsibilities.* The fundamental needs of aviation emergency affected persons and their relatives are (in addition to medical attention) information, advice and guidance, food, shelter and clothing.

The agencies listed as responsible for each function are the coordinating bodies in that area and will in fact use the resources of other organizations and the community at large in the performance of their allotted roles.

Each of the coordinating agencies nominates a liaison officer. The liaison officer reports to the human recovery coordinator to maintain contact between the coordinator and the welfare agency.

The airline operator advises the human recovery coordinator immediately of the names and telephone numbers of the persons responsible for the

welfare of their passengers.

In terms of operational responsibility, the respective organizations have the following functions in the AEP-HR Plan:

- *Police.* Includes responsibilities of dealing with the dead and notification of casualties to next of kin, plus the activation of NRIS, the National Registration and Inquiry Service for emergency-affected persons (ARCS supports the latter on their request), crowd control and requisite resources for the human recovery coordinator.
- *Airline Operator and ARCS.* Feeding of the ambulatory passengers.
- *Community Services Victoria (CSV) and Airline.* Financial assistance to help passengers re-establish themselves.
- *CSV and Victorian Council of Churches through ITIM.* Personal counseling.
- *Airline and SES.* Airlines provide emergency accommodations for passengers and crews. SES is a support agency and also provides help for affected residents.
- *Airline and Salvation Army.* Replacement of damaged clothing.

Some agencies have critical incident stress (CIS) debriefing for their registered members, either on a voluntary or statutory basis. The importance of stress relief and debriefing is increasingly recognized by emergency services.

The Human Recovery Plan in Action

The operation of the Human Recovery Plan (in the seminar scenario) would be undertaken from two locations, the flight's departure airport and the crash site.

When the senior operations controller is notified of the crash, the systems are in place for the chaplains to be paged on an emergency paging unit. The chaplains then decide on what action is necessary regarding the circumstances and notify sufficient personnel on the human recovery teams. There is a call-out system in place whereby 150 members of the clergy within a 15-minute radius of the two Melbourne airports (Melbourne and Essendon) are contacted and asked to assist in designated teams and areas. There are many factors that would determine the requirements, such as destination and nationality of the passengers, time of day, weather, elapsed

time since departure, number of passengers, percentage of deceased and injured, and proximity of crash site to the nearest airport or town.

The human recovery coordinator works from the emergency operations center at the airport coordinating ITIM chaplain team leaders and teams of local clergy to counsel relatives and staff, assisting police in notifying relatives, and communicating with the crash site to obtain and supply any necessary information. There may be a need to communicate with police when notifying relatives and to provide counsel for relatives if desired. There may be a need to contact other airports and counselors or clergy to assist in the notification and counsel of relatives and friends. This may include contacting chaplains at overseas airports who are fellow members of the International Association of Civil Aviation Chaplains (I.A.C.A.C.).

The deputy coordinator is the human recovery site coordinator for other ITIM chaplain team leaders and teams of local clergy, and he works under the direction of Community Service Victoria.

The human recovery coordinator and the deputy in conjunction with the CSV facilitate as soon as possible the provision of critical incident stress relief and debriefing for all the various groups of emergency workers, passengers, crew, airline staff and others in need of it both at the crash site and other relevant locations. ITIM has trained and proficient caring and counseling teams, as well as qualified CIS debriefing teams ready to move into action in any emergency, and there are other agencies in the community as well. Ongoing counseling would be the province of local clergy and counselors at the crash site and chaplains at the various airports unless further assistance was requested. ♦

Suggested Reading: "You'd Better Sit Down: There's Been A Crash," Flight Safety Foundation Flight Safety Digest, August 1989.

About the Authors

Rev. Dare A. Stevens worked for six years as a police officer with the South Australian Police before being ordained as a Churches of Christ minister. After nine years as a parish minister in Victoria and part-time ITIM (Interchurch and Industrial Mission) chaplaincy to the Victoria Police, Dare became a full-time chaplain with ITIM in 1984.

He was later appointed airport chaplain at Melbourne and Essendon airports. Since coming to the airport, Stevens has had the role of coordinating the human recovery plan of the airport emergency procedures which has involved revision, planning, training and exercises at Melbourne and Essendon airports. Stevens undertook the Graduate Certificate in Industrial Mission in 1984 and in 1988 completed studies in Clinical Pastoral Education.

Rev. Max H. Woolcock worked in administration for a government authority before studying for the ministry at the United Faculty of Theology. He has worked in parishes as a Uniting Church Minister for almost 14 years.

In July 1986 he became an industrial chaplain with ITIM and since November 1988 has been stationed at Melbourne and Essendon Airports.

In 1986 he undertook his graduate certificate in Industrial Mission and in 1987-1988 completed two Clinical Pastoral Education units with ITIM as part of his ongoing training.

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