

# UNNECESSARY Slide

I've been in the newspapers a lot again. This time, the discussion revolved around the late December American Airlines Boeing 737-800 runway excursion at Kingston, Jamaica. As usual, I got to try to comprehensively explain a complex set of interacting factors in a 10-word quote, a four-second sound bite. No matter how hard I try, I never get it quite right. Let me see if I can do better with 500 words.

The preliminary report shows that the airplane landed 4,000 ft (1,220 m) down a wet runway with a substantial tailwind. The tendency is to shrug off that approach as a dumb mistake in the cockpit, but that would be a real disservice. First, let's consider the environment during the approach. There were lots of bumps and lots of rain. The flight crew was offered a chance to circle to Runway 30 for a better wind angle, but considering that it was dark and rainy with clouds around 1,000 ft above ground level, it is easy to understand why the crew passed on that option.

Logically they chose to land straight in, with a significant tail wind that was on the margins of acceptability. With about 8,900 ft (2,700 m) of runway that didn't seem to be a big deal. The runway was wet, but there was plenty of it.

Some tough questions should be asked. First of all, why were the crew's choices limited to a tough downwind landing or a risky circling maneuver? There was an area navigation (RNAV) approach to Runway 30. I am not sure that option was really considered by air traffic control (ATC) or the flight crew. An RNAV approach can be a pain in the flight deck and something out of the ordinary for ATC in the control room. Global positioning system (GPS) approaches with vertical guidance can have huge safety benefits, but only if we are prepared to use

them. Have we spent years implementing something people don't actually intend to use?

Another interesting part of this accident is the airport. Much has been made of the fact that the runway wasn't grooved. Grooved pavement is common in the United States but it isn't required by International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards. It is worth noting that the runways were not grooved in the Air France accident in Toronto, or the TAM accident in São Paulo, Brazil. Maybe it is time for ICAO to tighten up compliance with that standard?

Something that worries me even more is the runway end safety area (RESA) in Kingston. It doesn't even come close to meeting ICAO standards. Many airports in the region have the same problem. This has been known and documented for years. It would be nice if somebody asked, why does this requirement seem to be so widely ignored? There also are proven arrestor pavement technologies that could have turned this accident into a non-event. Where were they?

Lots of things had to go wrong on that rainy night to have an outcome this bad. I hope the investigators ask, as a minimum: Why wasn't the RNAV approach considered a viable option? Is it time to admit that grooved pavement actually works? And when will airports start taking the requirements for RESAs seriously?



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