

Safety News

Communications Cleanup

Helicopter operators in the Gulf of Mexico should be evaluated after hurricanes and other events that might disrupt communications to ensure that the operators remain in compliance with their own communication contingency plans, the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) says.

The NTSB issued the recommendation to the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), citing the Sept. 6, 2005, forced landing of a Houston Helicopters Inc. (HHI) Sikorsky S-76A in Gulf waters after both engines lost power about 24 mi (44 km) southeast of Sabine Pass, Texas. All 10 passengers and both pilots exited the helicopter before it sank; the pilots and three passengers had serious injuries, and the seven remaining passengers received minor injuries. All were rescued after about 7 ½ hours in the water.

The NTSB's final report on the accident said the probable cause was "the pilots' delayed response to the no. 1 engine fire warning and the loss of power to both engines, which occurred for undetermined reasons."

The report said that the pilots had not contacted base operations when they departed on the accident flight, or when they departed and arrived on the previous flight, as required by HHI's FAA-approved operations specification. The pilots said that, before Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, they had been able to make most of their calls on the company's communications network. When the accident occurred, the company's network and cellular towers in the area were still out of operation because of storm damage.

"Although other Gulf offshore helicopter operators secured alternate means for their pilots to communicate with their base operations ... HHI did not take similar action," the report said. "Rather than provide a formal communications plan, HHI management suggested that its pilots use their own cellular phones or request assistance from oil platform personnel to relay flight departure information to base operations."

The report said that the accident pilots did not ask platform personnel to relay messages and did not contact a flight service station for assistance.



U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

"Each pilot reported in post-accident interviews that he assumed the other pilot made efforts to contact the company," the report said.

The NTSB said that search and rescue operations were delayed because of "the pilots' incomplete mayday call, the pilots' and HHI's noncompliance with company and FAA flight-following requirements and HHI's inadequate communications contingencies and procedures for reporting overdue flights."

The NTSB also cited the FAA's "inadequate surveillance of previously identified company deficiencies, including HHI's lack of adequate flight-following procedures," and said that the lack of surveillance "allowed HHI's corporate culture to remain lax with regard to safety."

Australia Increases Safety Oversight

Australian transportation officials have asked lawmakers to consider new legislation aimed at strengthening two aviation safety agencies and their oversight of airlines.

One proposal before the Australian Parliament calls for creation of a five-member board within the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) to "provide high-level direction to the organization's regulatory and safety oversight role," said Anthony Albanese, minister for infrastructure, transport, regional development and local government.

The measure also would improve CASA's ability to oversee foreign carriers operating in Australia, strengthen provisions for "preventing operators from continuing to operate services where CASA considers it unsafe for them to continue," and make it an offense to negligently carry dangerous goods on an airplane, Albanese said.

The second proposal would re-establish the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) as an independent statutory agency outside the government's Infrastructure Department. The measure also would give the ATSB new authority to "compel

agencies and operators within the aviation industry to respond to its formal recommendations within 90 days" — a provision that Albanese said would increase public confidence "that the lessons from past accidents will be acted upon in a timely manner."

He added that additional measures to strengthen aviation safety would be outlined in an aviation white paper expected to be finalized later this year.



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Charges Filed in Teterboro Crash

Five officials of the company that operated the Bombardier Challenger 600 that crashed on takeoff from Teterboro Airport in New Jersey, U.S., on Feb. 2, 2005, and a company pilot — who was not one of the crewmembers on the accident flight — have been charged in a 23-count indictment in connection with the crash (ASW, 3/07, p. 30).

The U.S. Attorney's Office in New Jersey said that the charges against the officials of Platinum Jet Management of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, included conspiracy to commit continuous willful violations of regulatory requirements for the operation of commercial charter aircraft.

The indictment accused the men of “routinely undertaking and concealing dangerous fueling and weight distribution practices” on the airplane, which overran a runway, crashed through an airport perimeter fence and onto a six-lane highway and struck a warehouse before coming to a stop. Nine people in the airplane and one person in the building received minor

injuries in the crash, which destroyed the airplane.

The U.S. Attorney's Office said that the airplane had been “over-fueled in a manner that caused the plane's center of gravity to exceed its forward weight limit for takeoff, contributing to the crash.” The office said that the over-fueling practice was commonly used by Platinum Jet to increase company profits.

Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra Jr. added, “The fuel loading was the primary contributing factor in the crash. It is astounding — and criminal — that owners and operators of jet aircraft would repeatedly engage in such a dangerous game with passengers and airplanes loaded to the brim with jet fuel. What this indictment alleges is an anything-goes

attitude by the defendants to get their planes in the air and maximize profits without regard to passenger safety or compliance with basic regulations.”

Marra's office said that the six men “joined a conspiracy to defraud charter flight customers, jet charter brokers and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) through interstate wire communications, and to defraud the United States by impeding and obstructing the FAA's regulation of commercial aircraft.”



U.S. National Transportation Safety Board

Laser Warnings

Pilots are being warned of increasingly common incidents involving laser illumination of aircraft, which — especially at low altitudes — can cause glare, flash blindness and other visual disturbances.

The International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (IFALPA) says that although laser illuminations can result from outdoor laser light shows, most recent incidents have resulted from deliberate action by a person with a hand-held laser pointer.

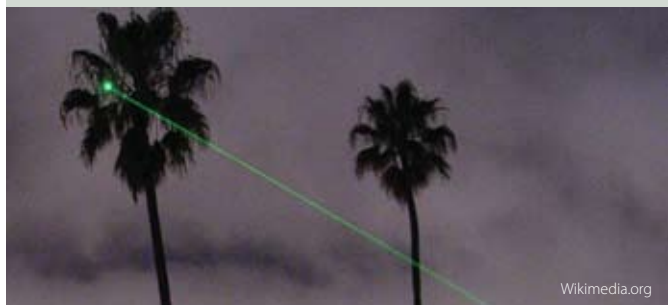
“This is either because the perpetrator has a lack of understanding of the consequences or, of more concern, the perpetrator understands the hazards of lasers and illuminates

aircraft with the intent of doing harm,” IFALPA says in a *Medical Briefing Leaflet* for pilots. “The problem has become more pronounced with the easy availability of powerful lasers, often purchased via the Internet.”

As an example of recent incidents, IFALPA cites the laser illuminations of at least four aircraft on approach to Sydney Airport in Australia in March 2008. The green laser beams came from four locations, IFALPA says, noting that in response to the illuminations, air traffic control (ATC) changed the runways in use.

Exposure to laser beams has resulted in burning of the cornea, the surface layer of the eye — a temporary condition made worse by rubbing the eye — but has rarely been associated with more serious, lasting damage.

IFALPA advises pilots, in the event of laser illumination, to look away from the laser, shield their eyes, engage the autopilot and, if possible, turn over control of the aircraft to a crewmember who was not exposed. Turning up cockpit lights can minimize the effects of further illuminations. The crew should inform ATC and later file a more detailed report with authorities, IFALPA said.



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Airport Turf

Synthetic turf designed to improve airport safety has been installed at the edges of one runway at Paris Charles de Gaulle International Airport.

FieldTurf Tarkett, the turf manufacturer, says the synthetic turf is designed to improve visibility by creating a visual contrast that makes the edge of the runway more conspicuous; reduce dust and debris on the runway; eliminate sources of food, water and shelter for wildlife in the area; and improve drainage.

Similar airport synthetic turf systems are in place at several other airports, including those in Boston, Hong Kong, New York and San Francisco, the manufacturer said.



U.S. Federal Aviation Administration

Infrastructure Upgrade Urged

The aviation infrastructure in the Middle East is not keeping pace with the industry's growth and must be upgraded to improve efficiency and capacity, an official of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) says.

Majdi Sabri, IATA regional vice president for the Middle East and North Africa, told a Civil Air Navigation Services Organisation conference in January that governments, air navigation service providers and other aviation groups must address the inefficiencies in air traffic that are threatening expansion of the industry.

"That means looking beyond national borders to the regionwide implementation of en route airspace and terminal control areas based on performance-based navigation," Sabri said. "It calls for investment in improved aeronautical information management and communications infrastructure. And it means making better use of aircraft and air traffic management technology to achieve an airspace structure that is based on user-preferred flight paths."

Air travel in the Middle East makes up 10 percent of international traffic, up from 5 percent seven years ago, IATA said.



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Next Phase for NextGen

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is ready for a new phase of its Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen) — the plan to transform the national airspace system with an infusion of advanced technologies to meet future safety, capacity and environmental needs.

The next phase of the program focuses on the avionics that will support NextGen operational capabilities expected to be in place by 2018.

"NextGen investment requires more than FAA investment, it requires industry investment," said Michael Romanowski, FAA director of NextGen integration and implementation, adding that the agency needs more input to determine exactly how NextGen will develop in the next few years and how aircraft should be equipped.

"The FAA cannot completely answer these questions on our own," he said. "We can't gain the traction we need to move forward unless we have the guidance, support and cooperation of the aviation community as full partners in this area, particularly in the area of equipage."

To provide this guidance, RTCA, an industry association that functions as an advisory committee to the government,



U.S. Federal Aviation Administration

has established a task force to develop recommendations on "how to get the most benefits from the NextGen mid-term operational capabilities," the FAA said.

RTCA said its task force will "recommend when, where and how the FAA and operators should implement the needed infrastructure, aircraft equipage, policies, procedures, training and other actions" for NextGen operations.

NVG Training

A 17-month trial of night vision goggles (NVGs) has ended in Australia, and approved operators are continuing to use the devices in designated operations and in training.

The Australian Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) has approved the use of NVGs for operators conducting flights for emergency medical services, law enforcement, search and rescue, marine pilot transfer, aerial fire fighting and NVG training. Their use has not been approved in private flight operations, except for training.

CASA plans to evaluate applications for NVG operations throughout 2009, and to oversee the safety of NVG use in operations that already have been approved.



Single Sky

Eurocontrol says it has taken a big step toward integrating all major groups involved in air traffic management with the first meeting of the Air Navigation Services Board, a 15-member panel designed to help shape Eurocontrol's work in support of the Single European Sky.

The new board represents air navigation services providers, air-space users, airports and the military.

Board Chairman Dieter Kaden said after the February meeting that the board's primary objective is to develop a consensus on priorities and "enhance the efficiency of the overall [air traffic management] supply chain."

In Other News ...

The ANA Group plans to extend the **line operations safety audit** (LOSA) — in which trained observers record flight crew actions during a flight — to all six member airlines. In 2006, ANA became the first Japanese airline to implement LOSA. ... A new **surface surveillance** system to improve visibility from aircraft and ground vehicles on runways and the apron (ramp) is being installed at Montreal-Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport. Sensis Corp.'s Multistatic Dependent Surveillance technology uses airport sensors and aircraft transponder signals to triangulate aircraft locations and provide the information to air traffic controllers. ... For the first time, the European Aviation Safety Agency has granted a **type certificate** to a transport aircraft from the Commonwealth of Independent States. The certificate was issued for the Tupolev Tu 204-120CE, a cargo version of the Tu 204.



Fire fighters look at the wreckage of a Colgan Air turboprop that crashed into a home in suburban Buffalo, New York, U.S., on Feb. 12, during an approach to Buffalo Niagara International Airport. The crash killed all 49 people in the Bombardier Q400 and one on the ground; the airplane was destroyed. The U.S National Transportation Safety Board is investigating.

Compiled and edited by Linda Werfelman.