EMERGENCY LOCATOR TRANSMITTERS

It was announced from Washington, DC on 5th January that the National Transportation Safety Board had issued two safety recommendations to the Federal Aviation Administration requiring a detailed inspection of all emergency locator transmitters (ELT) installed on general aviation aircraft to ensure that their mountings maintain their retention capabilities during an accident sequence.

An ELT is designed to broadcast a signal through an externally mounted antenna that contains the aircraft’s registration information and the global positioning system co-ordinates of the original signal. Also, the homing signal can be detected locally by other aircraft, air traffic control facilities, or rescue personnel who use a compatible receiver.

“In this case, the airplane was equipped with a functioning 406 megaHertz ELT, which can be a tremendous aid to search and rescue operations,” said NTSB Chairman Deborah A.P. Hersman. She added, “But this vital life-saving technology won't do anyone any good if it doesn't stay connected to the antenna.”

On 9th August 2010, a de Havilland turbine Otter airplane crashed in mountainous tree-covered terrain approximately ten miles from Aleknagik, Alaska. Nearly five hours after the crash, volunteer airborne search personnel located the aircraft approximately 19 miles from where the flight originated. The pilot and four passengers, including former U.S. Senator Ted Stevens, sustained fatal injuries. The other four passengers were seriously injured.

Aircraft involved in the search and rescue efforts and satellites did not detect any ELT signals. Following the discovery of the airplane, a para-rescuer found the ELT loose on the floor of the airplane. The ELT had activated but had separated from its mounting bracket and antenna.