AUSTRALIAN AIR INVESTIGATION

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) announced on 22nd March the completion of an investigation into a ‘weight and balance’ event two before.

On 6th March 2009, an Airbus A330-303 aircraft, registered VH-QPJ, was being loaded for dispatch on a scheduled international passenger service between Sydney, New South Wales and Hong Kong. Operational changes prior to the aircraft’s dispatch required an adjustment of the planned load, with the load controller electing to offload a pallet of freight originally scheduled for that flight, and substituting it with a lighter pallet in the load management system.

Following the pallet substitution in that system, the load controller did not amend the loading instructions that had been previously issued to the ramp staff loading the aircraft. That resulted in the ramp staff being unaware of the changed loading requirement and the loading proceeded as initially planned.

The discrepancy between the actual aircraft load and operator’s load management system was not detected during the completion of the load controller’s final distribution check prior to issuing the final load sheet to the flight crew. That resulted in the aircraft exceeding the structural maximum taxi weight by 384 kg and the maximum structural take-off weight by about 884 kg. It also resulted in the flight crew entering inaccurate centre of gravity and zero fuel weight data into a number of the aircraft’s systems.

Due to a delay in the notification of the loading error to the operator’s relevant departments, the aircraft operated another ten sectors before maintenance inspections for an overweight taxi were completed.

As a result of this occurrence, the operator implemented several changes to the process for managing load control activities. Those changes included: implementing a procedure to ensure the immediate notification of loading-related incidents and changes to the operating procedures in load control, including the introduction of a read and sign process for important ramp and load control communications; the appointment of a load control standards officer; and the conduct of a training needs analysis for load control officers.