NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD LATEST

Air traffic control incidents
On 22nd April the (US) National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) released preliminary reports on two air traffic control incident investigations.

On 18th April 18, 2011, at 1706 EDT, a Boeing 737 inbound for landing on runway 19L at Andrews Air Force Base was vectored too close to a C-17 military plane travelling ahead of it. The B737, which was carrying First Lady Michelle Obama and Mrs. Biden, the wife of Vice President Joe Biden, was directed to abort its landing after the required minimum separation between it and the C-17 was compromised.

On 27th March, 2011, at 1702 EDT, Southwest Airlines flight 821, a Boeing 737 from Phoenix to Orlando was requested by an air traffic controller at Central Florida Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) to attempt to make a visual identification and assessment of the occupants of a nearby Cirrus SR22, a general aviation aircraft that was not in radio contact (NORDO) with controllers. The two planes came within approximately 100 feet and 0.1 miles of each other.

Preliminary reports provide factual information related to the event; analysis of the incident, along with a determination of probable cause, will come at a later date when the investigations are completed, it is understood.

NTSB investigation into Lubbock, Texas crash
On 22nd April NTSB announced that it will hold a public Board meeting on its investigation into an accident in which a cargo airplane crashed on approach to landing in Lubbock, Texas. The purpose of the meeting will be to determine the probable cause of the accident and to consider proposed safety recommendations to reduce the likelihood of future such mishaps.

On 27th January, 2009, at 0437 CST, an ATR 42-320(N902FX) operating as Empire Airlines flight 8284 between Fort Worth and Lubbock, was on an instrument approach when it crashed short of the runway. The Captain was seriously injured; the First Officer sustained minor injuries. The airplane, which was registered to Federal Express Corporation (FedEx) and operated by Empire Airlines, Inc., was substantially damaged. A summary of the Board’s final report, which will include its findings, probable cause and safety recommendations, will appear on the website shortly after the conclusion of the meeting. The entire report will be published several weeks later.
NTSB and a 2010 plane crash involving former Senator Stevens
As part of its continuing investigation into the 9th August, 2010 aviation accident in Alaska, NTSB announced on 21st April that it had made the accident docket available to the public. Both former U.S. Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska and former NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe were among the eight passengers aboard the aircraft that crashed northeast of Aleknagik. The pilot and four passengers, including Senator Stevens, were killed. The other four passengers were seriously injured. The accident docket contains NTSB factual reports including: operations, meteorology, survival factors, powerplants, aircraft performance, human performance, airworthiness, and a synopsis of medical records. Also included are exhibits, interview transcripts, photographs, and other documents from the on-going investigation. Additional material will be added to the docket as it becomes available.

The information released is factual in nature and does not provide any analysis. A determination of findings, probable cause, and recommendations will be released during the public Board Meeting on 24th May, 2011.

Annual aviation statistics for 2010
The safety of civil aviation in the United States continued to make incremental improvements across most industry segments in 2010, based on the preliminary aviation accident statistics released on 20th April by the NTSB.

Twenty-six accidents were recorded for U.S. scheduled Part 121 airlines and six accidents on scheduled Part 135 commuters, all non-fatal.

Total accidents of on-demand operators (charter, air taxi, air tour and air medical operations) decreased from 47 in 2009 to 31 in 2010, despite a slight rise in the number of annual flight hours from 2,901,000 to 2,960,000. However, fatal accidents increased from two in 2009 to six in 2010. The number of fatalities for both years was 17.

The decline in general aviation accidents in 2010 continues its downward trend, but this sector still accounts for the greatest number of civil aviation accidents and fatal accidents. There were a total of 1,435 such accidents in 2010, 267 of them fatal, resulting in 450 fatalities.