

Managing an Aviation Disaster

For FAR Part 91, 121, 135, 139, 141, 142 & 145 Operators

Read the accident reports from the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) which investigates more than 1,800 aviation accidents a year. No matter who you are or what you do – FAR Part 91, 121, and 135 corporate, air taxi/charter, scheduled carrier, medevac, law enforcement, and air tour fixed-wing and rotorcraft operators or 139 airports, 141 flight schools, 142 training centers and 145 repair stations – and, no matter how good you think you are -- professional, by-the-book with an exemplary safety record -- nobody gets a free pass when it comes to the possibility of having to manage an aviation crisis. Nobody!

U.S. Aviation Accidents

Part 121 -- 1985 - 2006

750 Total Accidents
75 Fatal Accidents
2,477 Fatalities
3.75 Fatal Accidents Per Year
33 Fatalities Per Accident

Part 135 -- 1985 - 2006

1721 Total Accidents
457 Fatal Accidents
1117 Fatalities
22.85 Fatal Accidents Per Year
2.44 Fatalities Per Accident

Part 91 -- 1985 - 2006

39,873 Total Accidents
8,105 Fatal Accidents
14,716 Fatalities
405 Fatal Accidents Per Year
1.8 Fatalities Per Accident

Source: NTSB

EIGHT KILLED ON APPROACH TO COLORADO AIRPORT -- “. . . a Cessna Citation 560 . . . crashed about 4 nautical miles east of Pueblo Memorial Airport, Pueblo, Colorado, while on an instrument landing system approach to runway 26R. The two pilots and six passengers on board were killed, and the airplane was destroyed by impact forces and postcrash fire. The flight was operating under the provisions of 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 91 on an instrument flight rules flight plan. Instrument meteorological conditions prevailed at the time of the accident.” – NTSB Aircraft Accident Report

THREE PASSENGERS DEAD AS TOUR FLIGHT SLAMS INTO THE PACIFIC OCEAN -- “. . . an Aerospatiale AS350BA helicopter . . . encountered adverse weather and crashed into the Pacific Ocean several hundred feet off the coast of Kailiu Point, near Haena, Hawaii, on the island of Kauai. The sightseeing air tour flight was operated under the provisions of 14 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 135 and visual flight rules (VFR) with a company flight plan in effect. Localized instrument meteorological conditions (IMC) prevailed in the vicinity of the accident site. Three passengers were killed, and the commercial pilot and two other passengers received minor injuries. The flight

departed from Lihue Airport (LIH), Lihue, Hawaii, on the island of Kauai, at 1354 for the intended 45-minute tour.” – NTSB Aircraft Accident Report

10 KILLED IN AIR CRASH IN VIRGINIA -- “. . . a Beech King Air 200 . . . crashed into mountainous terrain in Stuart, Virginia, during a missed approach to Martinsville/Blue Ridge Airport (MTV), Martinsville, Virginia. The flight was transporting [passengers] to an automobile race in Martinsville, Virginia. The two flight crewmembers and eight passengers were killed, and the airplane was destroyed by impact forces and postcrash fire. The flight was operating under the provisions of 14 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 91 on an instrument flight rules (IFR) flight plan. Instrument meteorological conditions (IMC) prevailed at the time of the accident.” – NTSB Aircraft Accident Report

“Pay attention and you will survive. Don’t prepare and eventually you will face the consequences. Most aviation companies will experience a bad one sooner or later and will have hell to pay if not prepared.”

John Sullivan Sundance Helicopters

ONE KILLED IN AIR CARGO ACCIDENT IN KENTUCKY -- “. . . a Convair 580, N586P, crashed about 1 mile south of Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport (CVG), Covington, Kentucky, while on approach to runway 36R. The first officer was killed, and the captain received minor injuries. The airplane was destroyed by impact forces. The flight was operating under the provisions of 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 121 as a cargo flight . . . from Memphis International Airport, Memphis, Tennessee, to CVG. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed for the flight, which operated on an instrument flight rules flight plan.” – NTSB Aircraft Accident Report

10 KILLED WHEN FLIGHT GOES DOWN IN GULF OF MEXICO --

“. . . [a] Sikorsky S-76A++ helicopter . . . crashed into the Gulf of Mexico about 70 nautical miles south-southeast of Scholes International Airport (GLS), Galveston, Texas. The helicopter was transporting eight oil service personnel to the Transocean, Inc., drilling ship Discoverer Spirit, which was en route to a location about 180 miles south-southeast of GLS. The captain, copilot, and eight passengers aboard the helicopter were killed, and the helicopter was destroyed by impact forces. The flight was operating under the provisions of 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 135 on a visual flight rules flight plan. Night visual meteorological conditions prevailed at the time of the accident.” – NTSB Aircraft Accident Report

SOME OF WHAT YOUR CRISIS MANAGEMENT MANUAL SHOULD CONTAIN

- Vulnerability Risk Audit**
- Process for Handling Each Crisis**
- List of Things to do and How to do Them**
- Company “GO” Team Members**
- List of Duties and Responsibilities**
- Key Contact Information**
- Sample Messages to be Communicated**
- Sample Q/A -- Prepared & Rehearsed**
- Company Background Data for Easy Reference**
- Process for Recovering From a Crisis**

Imagine if this happened to you. Think of the families of the victims and what they are going through. Think of your own employees and the impact this will have on them. Think of your customers and how they will react. And, while you and your staff are managing all of this, your business must keep running and you have to stay in the air. As one chief pilot said, “Given the great care that we have taken to ensure our safety, it’s not fair that it happened to us. Sometimes tragic things happen to good people.” No it isn’t. But, “stuff” happens. The question is – are you prepared if this stuff happens to you?

“This course was awesome. This is great training and we look forward to getting our plan in place even though we hope to never have to use it. Thanks for a great day.”

Bo Lusardi, SAS Institute

What would you do if the unthinkable happens? How would you comfort the families? How would you take care of your employees? How would you deal with the NTSB or an unsympathetic news media relentlessly probing into every nook and cranny of your company? How about your company’s reputation – *the reputation that you’ve spent years crafting?* How badly damaged will it be? What will you have to do to recover? How about the local elected official attacking your credibility and using your crisis to gain visibility?

A survey of corporate chief executives revealed that 81 percent believe that their company’s crisis response capabilities are useless but that 63 percent were responding preemptively to shore things up. Is yours and are you? Do you have a comprehensive

crisis management plan? Has everyone in your company been trained on how to respond and what to do in the event one of your aircraft goes down?

And, suffering a fatal accident is not the only crisis which could impact your company. Security breach, bomb threat, terrorist attack, employee discord, workplace violence, civil disorder, health & safety, activism, litigation, government investigation, quality control issues, corporate scandal, natural disasters all can significantly affect your people and the company's future and are all crises for which we must prepare. Any situation that involves human safety, extensive product damage, disruption of business, or grounds for litigation must be considered a crisis.

"This is a terrific course. Every operator should take advantage of Steve's unique expertise. Some day you may need to put into practice everything you learn in this course."

Rhonda Carraway, ERA Aviation

The reality is – you will receive negative publicity, there will be government involvement, you likely will be sued by victim's families particularly where there are fatalities, you could suffer a loss of customers, there could well be a political backlash, and there definitely will be emotional trauma to employees.

Are you really ready for all of this?

"Many senior aviation executives have this false sense of security and simply don't believe this stuff will ever happen to them. As a result, they tend to bury their heads in the sand believing that if they don't think about it then it won't happen", said Steve Bassett who teaches crisis management and disaster response to aviation operators. "Our main objective in the course is to empower people to be able to rapidly, effectively, calmly and objectively respond to



Steve Bassett

Companies and Organizations Which Have Taken CWC101

Acro Helipro
Airgreen (Italy)
Air Logistics
AirSure Ltd.
AirMed International
Austria Minister of Interior
Baldwin Aviation
BP American
Bristow Group
Canadian Helicopters, Ltd.
Collier County Sheriff Department
Cougar Helicopters
Dallas Airmotive
Dynamic Aviation
Era Aviation
Erickson Air Crane
Executive Travel Air
Food Lion Flight Department
Grand Canyon Airlines
Green Bay County Rescue Services
Heli-1 Corporation
Helicopteros de Guatemala
HeliFlight Shares
Helifor Industries
Helinet Aviation Services
Henrico County (VA) Police Department
HeloAir
H.W. Farren
Integral Energy
JLT Aerospace North America
L.A. County Fire & Rescue
Liberty Helicopters
Lee County Medstar
Lowe's Aviation Department
Makani Kai Helicopters
Massachusetts State Police
Mercy Flight
Million Air/Salt Lake City
Papillon Helicopters
Pennsylvania State Police
Pinto Aviation
San Diego Fire & Rescue
San Joaquin Helicopters
SAS, Inc.
Saudi Aramco
Scenic Airlines
Sea Launch Company
Seminole County (FL) Fire Department
Silver State Helicopters
Skyline Helicopters
Summit Helicopters
Sundance Helicopters
Temsco
U.S. Department of Defense
U.S. Navy
West Air
Western Area Power
Winthrop Harbor Police Department

a crisis situation with caring and compassion and exactly the way they are trained.”

Bassett is chairman and CEO of The Communications Workshop, LLC, located in the Washington, DC suburb of North Laurel, MD. He designed *Coping With Crisis 101- Managing an Aviation Disaster* after seeing how poorly prepared most companies are at handling such a crisis. “Most companies truly care and really do want to do the right thing and some even have what they consider to be a plan. But, most operators are woefully either unprepared or under prepared,” he said. “Our very unique and quite comprehensive training program fixes that.”

An aviation veteran of more than 30 years and an instrument-rated pilot, Bassett has served as president of the United States Air Tour Association (USATA), senior vice president of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), and executive vice president of Air Vegas Airlines. He has worked with the broad spectrum of aviation entities. He was trained in aviation accident investigations by the National Transportation Safety Board and holds multiple certificates from the NTSB. He has nearly 40 years in the communications business spending the first 10 as a major market and network television and radio sportscaster and is a member of the Helicopter Association International (HAI), Association of Air

Medical

Services (AAMS), Airborne Law Enforcement Association (ALEA), and Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA).

“Managing a crisis, particularly a fatal accident, is extremely hard work,” said Bassett. “We stress in class that what you do in the first

two hours sets the stage for everything else. You have 120 minutes to get it right and you need to know what you are doing.” As one aviation CEO whose company experienced a fatal accident said, “There is nothing that can prepare you for the emotions that are in play following a fatal accident. Next-of-kin, co-workers, customers and



Course Topics Include:

- What is Crisis Management
- Sources of Disasters
- How Other Disasters Were Handled
- Four Steps to Crisis Management
- The Crisis Game Plan
- Preparing Your CM Manual
- NTSB Accident Investigations
- Working with the NTSB
- Parties to an Investigation
- Defining a “Go” Team
- What to Have in a “Go” Bag
- Crisis Public Relations
- Political Fallout
- Understanding the News Media
- The Business of News
- Blogging's Impact on You
- Dealing with Reporters
- Bogus & Bias News Reporting
- Media Relations
- Managing Media Coverage
- Handling the Questions
- Conducting a News Briefing
- Handling Media Ambushes
- Effective Public Speaking
- Crisis Jeopardy

“Coping With Crisis 101 is a fantastic course and Steve does a terrific job of presenting the material. We put our senior staff through the program at our headquarters in Birmingham and the training everyone got is exceptional. I highly recommend this program to everyone in the air medical industry.”

Jeffrey Tolbert, AirMed International

owners themselves will respond in very different ways and it is impossible to predict how. Some will be fine. Others will be angry and will want to blame someone. Others will be in shock or will go into a shell. The crisis management team must understand that they are dealing with a highly charged situation and will need to give people time and space while at the same time not having time and space themselves."

In 2006, Kirt Butz, chief pilot for Eagle III County Rescue Services, was faced with the daunting challenge of managing the aftermath of a fatal accident. He was 90 minutes away when he got the call that one of his aircraft had gone down and the pilot, the sole occupant in the aircraft, had been killed. The



accident occurred just weeks after Butz took the Coping With Crisis 101-Managing an Aviation Disaster training course. Fortunately, he had been able to put in place a skeleton crisis management plan based on what he learned in the class.

"This is an excellent course and will help us guide our clients in putting a plan in place. A wonderful tool for us to use as insurance brokers. A must course for all of our clients."

Jay Scarbo, AirSure

Butz and his team immediately sprang into action. They launched the "go" team, assigned people to tasks, contacted NTSB and FAA, drafted a news release using the template provided during the class, established an emergency ops center, selected and briefed their spokesperson, held their first news conference within four hours, held two internal briefings daily, established an employee assistance effort, worked closely with the victim's family, brought them to the area and rented them a car, assigned family assistance companions, provided a limo and hotel, and provided support care, and more.

"Unless you understand that it could happen to you and take the steps necessary to prepare for it, you are putting yourself, your employees and your company at risk," commented Butz.

Butz and his Eagle III team did it right. Not everyone does. "I have seen companies mess it up badly," said Bassett. "One company refused to work with the victim's families, refused to talk with the news media, failed to get emotional support and counseling for their employees and actually fired two employees because they were having difficulty coming to work. They eventually went out of business which is not surprising."

"A great course especially for those relatively new to managing aviation programs."

Capt. Humberto I. Cardounel, Jr., Henrico County Police

Coping With Crisis 101-Managing an Aviation Disaster is offered as a one day or two day course. The two-day course adds extended practical application exercises in the actual hands-on development of the crisis management plan and working with the

news media and includes training on effective public speaking and an additional training exercise on media interview techniques in four separate interview settings. Besides providing the one- and two-day course on-site at a company's facility, Bassett also consults with companies and will facilitate the process of the development of their crisis management plan, will develop and implement training exercises for them, and is available to provide on-site counseling and assistance to companies experiencing a crisis situation.

The course is designed for those key employees who should be a part of a company's crisis response team – president/CEO, chief pilot, director of operations and maintenance, safety officer, airfield program director and medical flight personnel, CFO, airport

"Steve's CWC101 course should be an essential part of every flight department's training program. I took the course at HAI's HeliExpo then Steve came to our company headquarters and put more than 40 of our key staff through it. You are making a huge mistake if you don't take this course - now!"

Frank Swisher, Chief Pilot, Erickson Air Crane

managers, marketing, customer service, communications/PR, insurance representatives, and legal counsel. It focuses on four main areas: (1) Prevention, (2) Preparation, (3) Response, and (4) Recovery. It provides a checklist of things to consider to help avoid an aviation disaster and helps you work through the internal audit process; it assists you in developing a turn-key crisis management plan to trigger in the event an accident occurs; and, it educates you on how to help protect the company and its assets by dealing with the public scrutiny and news media onslaught effectively. It also includes a practical application exercise where your key company spokespersons are put in front of a camera and taught how to handle the media interview process.

The key, says Bassett, is people. "If you pay attention to the people, taking care of victim's families and your own employees; if you get the people part right, everything else will fall into place. Mess up the people part and it doesn't matter how good you may be at the rest of the crisis management process, you will have failed."

"During my career I have been exposed to a variety of programs on crisis management systems. I truly believe this is one of the best. You leave the class with all of the tools you need to develop and implement a comprehensive 'Crisis/Disaster Management Program' that will be appropriate for all aspects of your company."

Harold Summers
Director of Flight Operations & Technical Services
Helicopter Association International (HAI)

Here are some basic tips offered by Bassett:

Identify and assemble a Crisis Management Planning Group. It should include, but not be limited to, a member of senior management, key supervisors, employees, Federal, State & Local Government Agencies, local fire, police and other officials, communications specialists, customers, local politicians, local news media, key contractors, legal counsel and don't forget your insurance representatives.

Make the following determinations: (1) For what crises are we preparing? (2) How should we company respond to each crisis situation? (3) Who will do what and when?

Answer some very important questions such as are you comfortable that you have done everything in your power to ensure that the “crisis” you have identified and prioritized, does not happen? If not, what more should you be doing, and what is the time frame for doing it?

What more should you be doing to screen all new employee’s backgrounds, particularly pilots and

“I thought I had an adequate accident plan but this course takes preparation to a new level. Invaluable information!”

Jon Mayer, Heli-1 Corporation

maintenance personnel? What more should you be doing regarding employee training and recurrent evaluations, again particularly pilots and maintenance personnel? What more should you be doing to improve your pilot, AMT, and maintenance record keeping processes? If the FAA or NTSB reviewed your records today, would you be in compliance with all applicable FARs? If not, what more should you be doing? What improvements can you make in your “Flight Ops Decision-Making Process” to further improve safety? What improvements can you make in your “Risk Analysis Go/No Go” Policies, Processes, Procedures, and Practices? What steps have you taken or should you be taking to ensure there is no pressure from sales or senior management to fly when it is unsafe? Are there any budget corners being cut in Operations, Pilot & AMT Training, or Aircraft Maintenance? If so, what are you going to do to correct this serious problem?

12 Steps to Preparing Your Crisis Management Plan

1. Assemble Senior Management Group
2. Ensure Adequacy of Airside Crisis Prevention Initiatives
3. Determine Company “GO” Team
4. Assign Staff to Perform Key Tasks
5. Do a Vulnerability Risk Audit on Your Facility
6. Ensure Adequacy of Landside Crisis Prevention Initiatives
7. Fix Any Potential Weaknesses
8. Listen to the Professionals Around You
9. Develop a Media Information Packet
10. Decide How Each Potential Crisis Will be Handled
11. Create Contact Lists

Most fatal aviation accidents happen someplace else. The company needs to be prepared to rapidly deploy key personnel to the accident scene to begin coordinating with the FAA and NTSB and begin implementing other crisis management and victim assistance procedures. Determine who will be on your “GO” team.

Assign staff to perform several tasks that usually need to occur simultaneously, such as, prepare passenger list/manifest, serve as company party to the investigation, liaison(s) with NTSB and other investigators, serve as primary spokesperson for the company, gather company background for media information packet, medial

liaison/news briefings and communications, select and arrange for off-site location for news briefings, and more.

Review and rank the potential for an “at-facility crisis?” If you have, is the list based on a vulnerability risk audit, and what is the probability or potential financial impact of each occurring at your facility?

Seek additional guidance from professionals. In a time of crisis that is particularly appropriate. There are a multitude of people and organizations who can be a valuable asset to you such as your insurance company/broker, legal counsel, senior management and supervisors, other key employees, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), your local FSDO, NTSB, Federal, state, and local government officials, local fire, police, and other officials, state and local political representatives and their staffs, the local news media, friends/contacts, outside communications specialists, key customers, and many others.

“Excellent program.. I have been involved in the investigation of many accidents. But, there are a number of things I have never thought about. With this course, I now see many gaps in our own program that need to be filled. Thank you.”

Mark Fojtek, Silver State Helicopters

Make sure you have a media information packet ready to hand out. During a time of crisis when things are moving quickly there is an information vacuum which you can fill with your own material or the media can fill with speculation. You decide which way you want it.

For more information on Coping With Crisis 101-Managing an Aviation Disaster, and their full range of crisis management services, contact The Communications Workshop, LLC at (301) 483-0158 or go to their web site at www.thecommunicationsworkshop.com.

