

824. AIR CARRIER OPERATIONS BULLETIN NO. 7-76-23

ACTIONS RELATIVE TO TURBULENCE ENCOUNTERS

(Formerly Air Carrier Operations Bulletin No. 71-6).

As a result of an accident involving a B-747 which encountered severe turbulence, six passengers and one stewardess were hospitalized, and 15 passengers and one stewardess were treated for minor injuries. All injuries were the result of severe turbulence encountered while climbing through FL 280 at an indicated speed of 280 knots.

- a. Seatbelt Discipline - During this accident, seatbelt signs were on throughout the flight; however, of two hospitalized passengers, one indicated she did not have her seatbelt fastened, and another had his seatbelt fastened loosely because he was not able to take up the slack of the belt. Both of these passengers were injured when their heads struck the ceiling on the initial sharp downdraft but they were able to maintain their seated position during the remainder of the turbulence encounter.

The Safety Board recommended that:

Seatbelt discipline be strictly enforced when the seatbelt sign is on. Attendants should make a careful visual inspection of all seatbelts before takeoff and offer assistance to anyone encountering difficulty with a snug fit. When the seatbelt sign is on for prolonged periods, a public address announcement should be made at regular intervals.

- b. Narrow Aisle Stretchers - Following the abort of the flight and the landing, difficulty was encountered in removing from the aisle passengers suspected of having back injuries. This was because the aisle widths were too narrow for standard stretchers, resulting in great difficulty transferring patients from lying positions in the aisle to stretchers.

The Safety Board recommended that:

The FAA advise medical facilities serving airports to stock narrow "carrying boards" or narrow stretchers that can be easily used in the space of an air carrier passenger compartment aisle to facilitate removal of non-ambulatory patients.

- c. Air Carrier Policy on Deviation of Flight - Following this encounter with turbulence, the flight service director went forward to the cockpit and advised the captain that several passengers were severely injured or ill. The captain requested the service director to return to the passenger compartment and to reassess the situation. After reassessing the cabin injuries, the attendant reported to the captain a second time that several persons appeared to be severely injured. Ten to fifteen minutes elapsed between the initial report of passenger injuries and the captain's decision to divert the flight.

The Safety Board recommended that:

The FAA review and, where appropriate, amend air carrier policy concerning in-flight assessments of injury or illness of passengers in order to preclude unnecessary delays in securing necessary medical assistance.

- d. Principal Operations Inspectors are requested to assure that the above recommendations are acted upon as soon as possible.