

August 5, 2020

Mr. Steve Dickson
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration

The attached letter from the NTSB Chairman provides information about the NTSB's July 14, 2020, report *Rapid Descent and Crash into Water, Atlas Air Inc. Flight 3591, Boeing 767-375BCF, N1217A, Trinity Bay, Texas, February 23, 2019*, AAR-20/02. The details of this accident investigation and the resulting safety recommendations may be found in the attached report, which can also be accessed at <http://www.nts.gov>.

The NTSB is vitally interested in these recommendations because they are designed to prevent accidents and save lives. We would appreciate a response within 90 days of the date of this letter, detailing the actions you have taken or intend to take to implement these recommendations. When replying, please refer to the safety recommendations by number (for example, Safety Recommendations A-20-33 through -38, A-15-7 and -8, A-05-1, and A-10-17, -19, and -20). We encourage you to submit your response to ExecutiveSecretariat@nts.gov. If your reply exceeds 20 megabytes, including attachments, please e-mail us at the same address for instructions on how to send larger documents. Please do not submit both an electronic copy and a hard copy of the same response.



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Office of the Chairman

National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, DC 20594

August 5, 2020

Mr. Steve Dickson
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Mr. Dickson:

This letter provides information about the National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) July 14, 2020, report, *Rapid Descent and Crash into Water, Atlas Air Inc. Flight 3591, Boeing 767-375BCF, N1217A, Trinity Bay, Texas, February 23, 2019, AAR-20/02*. The details of this accident investigation and the resulting safety recommendations may be found in the attached report, which can also be accessed at <http://www.nts.gov>.

As a result of this investigation, we identified the following safety issues:

- Inadvertent activation of the go-around mode;
- Flight crew performance;
- Atlas Air Inc.'s (Atlas') evaluation of the first officer (FO);
- Industry pilot hiring process deficiencies;
- Awareness information for Boeing 767 and 757 pilots;
- Adaptations of automatic ground collision avoidance technology; and
- Cockpit image recorders.

Accordingly, the NTSB makes the following safety recommendations to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Additional information regarding these recommendations can be found in the noted sections of the report.

- Inform Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 119 certificate holders, air tour operators, fractional ownership programs, corporate flight departments, and governmental entities conducting public aircraft operations about the hiring process vulnerabilities identified in this accident, and revise Advisory Circular 120-68H, "Pilot Records Improvement Act and Pilot Records Database," to emphasize that operators should include flight operations subject matter experts early in the records review process and ensure that significant training issues are identified and fully evaluated. (A-20-33) (See section 2.4.2.)

- Implement the pilot records database and ensure that it includes all industry records for all training started by a pilot as part of the employment process for any Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 119 certificate holder, air tour operator, fractional ownership program, corporate flight department, or governmental entity conducting public aircraft operations regardless of the pilot's employment status and whether the training was completed. (A-20-34) (See section 2.5.1.)
- Ensure that industry records maintained in the pilot records database are searchable by a pilot's certificate number to enable a hiring operator to obtain all background records for a pilot reported by all previous employers. (A-20-35) (See section 2.5.1.)
- Establish a confidential voluntary data clearinghouse of deidentified pilot selection data that can be used to conduct studies useful for identifying effective, scientifically based pilot selection strategies. This program should be modeled after programs like Aviation Safety Information and Analysis Sharing and Flight Operations Quality Assurance. (A-20-36) (See section 2.5.2.)
- Issue a safety alert for operators to inform pilots and operators of Boeing 767- and 757-series airplanes about the circumstances of this accident and alert them that, due to the close proximity of the speedbrake lever to the left go-around mode switch, it is possible to inadvertently activate the go-around mode when manipulating or holding the speedbrake lever as a result of unintended contact between the hand or wrist and the go-around switch. (A-20-37) (See section 2.6.1.)
- Convene a panel of aircraft performance, human factors, and aircraft operations experts to study the benefits and risks of adapting military automatic ground collision avoidance system technology for use in civil transport-category airplanes and make public a report on the committee's findings. (A-20-38) (See section 2.6.2.)

In addition, the NTSB reiterates the following recommendations to the FAA:

- Require that all existing aircraft operated under Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) Part 121 or 135 and currently required to have a cockpit voice recorder and a flight data recorder be retrofitted with a crash-protected cockpit image recording system compliant with Technical Standard Order TSO-C176a, "Cockpit Image Recorder Equipment," TSO-C176a or equivalent. The cockpit image recorder should be equipped with an independent power source consistent with that required for cockpit voice recorders in 14 CFR 25.1457. (A-15-7) (See section 2.7)

- Require that all newly manufactured aircraft operated under Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) Part 121 or 135 and required to have a cockpit voice recorder and a flight data recorder also be equipped with a crash-protected cockpit image recording system compliant with Technical Standard Order TSO-C176a, “Cockpit Image Recorder Equipment,” or equivalent. The cockpit image recorder should be equipped with an independent power source consistent with that required for cockpit voice recorders in 14 CFR 25.1457. (A-15-8) (See section 2.7)

In the same report, we also reiterated and classified four previously issued safety recommendations to the FAA:

- Require all Part 121 and 135 air carriers to obtain any notices of disapproval for flight checks for certificates and ratings for all pilot applicants and evaluate this information before making a hiring decision. (A-05-1, classified “Open—Unacceptable Response” in section 2.5.1)
- Require 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 121, 135, and 91K operators to document and retain electronic and/or paper records of pilot training and checking events in sufficient detail so that the carrier and its principal operations inspector can fully assess a pilot’s entire training performance. (A-10-17, classified “Open—Unacceptable Response” in section 2.5.1)
- Require 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 121, 135, and 91K operators to provide the training records requested in Safety Recommendation A-10-17 to hiring employers to fulfill their requirement under the Pilot Records Improvement Act. (A-10-19, classified “Open—Unacceptable Response” in section 2.5.1)
- Develop a process for verifying, validating, auditing, and amending pilot training records at 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 121, 135, and 91K operators to guarantee the accuracy and completeness of the records. (A-10-20, classified “Open—Unacceptable Response” in section 2.5.1)

The NTSB is vitally interested in these recommendations because they are designed to prevent accidents and save lives. We would appreciate a response within 90 days of the date of this letter, detailing the actions you have taken or intend to take to implement these recommendations. When replying, please refer to the safety recommendations by number (Safety Recommendations A-20-33 through -38, A-15-7 and -8, A-05-1, and A-10-17, -19, and -20). We encourage you to submit your response to ExecutiveSecretariat@ntsb.gov. If your reply, including attachments, exceeds 20 megabytes, please e-mail us at the same address for instructions. Please do not submit both an electronic copy and a hard copy of the same response.

Sincerely,

[Original Signed]

Robert L. Sumwalt, III
Chairman