



NTSB

SAFETY ALERT

National Transportation Safety Board



Landing at the Wrong Airport



Check and confirm destination airport

The problem

- Without adequate preparation, robust monitoring, and cross-checking of position using all available resources, flight crews may misidentify a nearby airport that they see during the approach to their destination airport.
- The risk of an accident increases because the runway at the wrong airport may not be long enough to accommodate the landing airplane, and other aircraft operating at the airport may also be unaware of potential conflicting traffic.
- Air traffic controllers may not detect a wrong airport landing in time to intervene because of other workload or radar coverage limitations.

Related incidents

The following incidents involving air carriers landing at the wrong airport occurred within 2 months of each other:

- On January 12, 2014, about 1810 local time, a Boeing 737-7H4, Southwest Airlines flight 4013, landed at the wrong airport in Branson, Missouri, in night visual meteorological conditions (VMC). The airplane was scheduled to fly from Chicago Midway International Airport, Chicago, Illinois, to Branson Airport. Instead, the flight crew mistakenly landed the airplane at M. Graham Clark Downtown Airport, Branson, Missouri. The flight crew reported that they were flying direct to a fix for an area navigation (RNAV) approach. They advised the air traffic controller that they had the airport in sight; they were then cleared for the visual approach. Although the correct destination airport was depicted on their cockpit displays, the flight crew reported flying to the airport that they visually identified as their destination; once the airport was in sight, they did not reference their cockpit displays. The airplane stopped at the end of the 3,738-ft runway after a hard application of the brakes. ([DCA14IA037](#))
- On November 21, 2013, about 2120 local time, a Boeing 747-400LCF (Dreamlifter) landed at the wrong airport in Wichita, Kansas, in night VMC. The airplane was being operated as a cargo flight from John F. Kennedy International Airport, Jamaica, New York, to McConnell Air Force Base, Wichita, Kansas. Instead, the flight crew mistakenly landed the airplane at Colonel James Jabara Airport, Wichita, Kansas. The flight crew indicated that during their approach to the airport, they saw runway lights that they misidentified as McConnell Air Force Base. The flight was cleared for the RNAV GPS 19L approach, and the flight crew saw Jabara but misidentified it as McConnell. The flight crew then completed the flight by visual reference to the Jabara runway. Once on the ground at Jabara, the flight crew was uncertain of the airplane's location until confirmed by the McConnell Air Force Base tower controller. The Jabara runway is 6,101 ft long, whereas McConnell runways are 12,000 ft long. ([DCA14IA016](#))

What can flight crews do?

- Adhere to standard operating procedures (SOPs), verify the airplane's position relative to the destination airport, and use available cockpit instrumentation to verify that you are landing at the correct airport.
- Maintain extra vigilance when identifying the destination airport at night and when landing at an airport with others in close proximity.
- Be familiar with and include in your approach briefing the destination airport's layout and relationship to other ground features; available lighting such as visual glideslope indicators, approach light systems, and runway lighting; and instrument approaches.
- Use the most precise navigational aids available in conjunction with a visual approach when verifying the destination airport.
- Confirm that you have correctly identified the destination airport before reporting the airport or runway is in sight.

Interested in more information?

The incident reports referenced in this safety alert are accessible by NTSB incident number from the NTSB's [Aviation Accident Database & Synopses](http://www.nts.gov/aviationquery/index.aspx) web page at www.nts.gov/aviationquery/index.aspx. One incident is still under investigation. Public dockets are accessible from the NTSB's [Docket Management System](http://dms.nts.gov/pubdms/) web page at <http://dms.nts.gov/pubdms/> for completed investigations.

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) [Advisory Circular 120-71A](http://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/advisory_circulars/), "Standard Operating Procedures for Flight Deck Crewmembers," provides information about the development, implementation, and updating of SOPs and can be accessed from www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/advisory_circulars/. Appendix 2, "Stabilized Approach: Concepts and Terms," provides guidance on approaches and landings.

Chapter 2 of the FAA's *Aeronautical Information Manual*, "[Aeronautical Lighting and Other Airport Visual Aids](http://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/media/AIM.pdf)," provides a comprehensive resource on airport lighting and can be accessed from http://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/media/AIM.pdf.

FAA Safety Alert for Operators (SAFO) 07003, "[Confirming the Takeoff Runway](http://www.faa.gov/other_visit/aviation_industry/airline_operators/airline_safety/safo/all_safos/)," discusses takeoffs from the wrong runway and includes guidance also applicable for verifying the destination airport. The SAFO states, "**The Golden Rule—Use all available resources, old and new, to ensure your airplane is positioned correctly...**The best SOPs may be a blend of proven old practices and new ones." The SAFO can be accessed from www.faa.gov/other_visit/aviation_industry/airline_operators/airline_safety/safo/all_safos/.

The Flight Safety Foundation (FSF) published a special FSF report in its *Flight Safety Digest*, "[Killers in Aviation: FSF Task Force Presents Facts about Approach-and-Landing and Controlled-Flight-Into-Terrain Accidents](http://www.flightsafety.org/)" (1998), and an article in its *AeroSafety World*, "[From Nonprecision Approaches to Precision-Like Approaches: Methods and Operational Procedures](http://www.flightsafety.org/)" (Oct. 2007), highlighting on-board equipment available to flight crews. Both documents can be accessed from <http://flightsafety.org/>.

This NTSB safety alert and others can be accessed from the NTSB's [Safety Alerts](http://www.nts.gov/safety/safety-alerts/Pages/default.aspx) web page at <http://www.nts.gov/safety/safety-alerts/Pages/default.aspx>.