

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: April 2, 1981

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Forwarded to:

Mr. Charles E. Weithoner  
Acting Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
Washington, D.C. 20594

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

A-81-35

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On the night of September 12, 1980, a Douglas DC-3, owned and operated by Florida Commuter Airlines, crashed and sank in approximately 1,800 feet of water near West End Settlement, Grand Bahama Island. All 4 crewmembers and 30 passengers were killed.

The Safety Board's investigation of the accident has revealed that the aircraft was being operated in an area of forecast thunderstorm activity although it was not equipped with, nor was it required to have, an airborne weather detection device.<sup>1/</sup> This accident again focused our attention on the fact that the Douglas DC-3 is exempt from airborne weather detection device requirements of 14 CFR 121.357, 14 CFR 135.173, and 14 CFR 135.175 because it was certificated before the enactment of the Transport Category Rules. The Safety Board believes that this apparent regulatory gap contributed to an obviously unsafe flight operation. Thunderstorms and other forms of severe weather activity can be detected by airborne weather detection devices, thus warning the flightcrew of a potentially unsafe flightpath. The evidence indicates that thunderstorms were in the area where the aircraft was last reported.

The Safety Board is aware of and supports the independent review being conducted by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Bahama Government of equipment requirements for large aircraft (as defined by 14 CFR Part 1) certificated before the enactment of Transport Category Rules.

The Safety Board believes that an airborne weather detection device is an essential system for the safe and efficient operation of all aircraft and therefore urges the Federal Aviation Administration to require all multiengine small aircraft having a passenger seating configuration, excluding any pilot seat, of more than 10 seats and all large aircraft which are engaged in passenger carrying operations to have an airborne weather detection device in satisfactory operating condition on board when hazardous

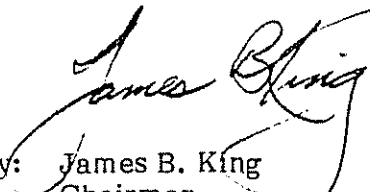
<sup>1/</sup> As used herein airborne weather detection device includes airborne thunderstorm detection equipment (14 CFR 135.173) and airborne weather radar equipment (14 CFR 121.357 and 14 CFR 135.175).

weather conditions may be expected along the route to be flown. Such equipment is currently required only for large transport category aircraft and for small multiengine aircraft having passenger seating configurations (excluding any pilot seat) of 10 or more seats.

Accordingly, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Aviation Administration:

Require all aircraft used in revenue passenger operations which are not presently required to be equipped with an approved weather detection device under 14 CFR 121 or 14 CFR 135 to have an appropriate airborne weather detection device that is in satisfactory operating condition when flight under IFR or night VFR conditions is anticipated and current weather reports indicate that thunderstorms or other potentially hazardous weather conditions that can be detected with an airborne weather detection device may reasonably be expected along the route to be flown. (Class II, Priority Action) (A-81-35).

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, and McADAMS and BURSLEY, Members concurred in this recommendation. GOLDMAN, Member, did not participate.

  
By: James B. King  
Chairman