

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: January 28, 1981

Forwarded to:

Mr. Charles E. Weithoner
Acting Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
Washington, D.C. 20591

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

A-81-8

On March 27, 1980, the National Transportation Safety Board investigated an accident near Denver, Colorado, involving a Beech Kingair 200, N456L. The aircraft departed Arapahoe County Airport, Englewood, Colorado, at 1432 mountain standard time on an instrument flight rules (IFR) flight plan to Lufkin, Texas. About 7 minutes after takeoff at an altitude of about 12,800 feet, the pilot reported to Denver departure control that the aircraft was encountering icing and requested a return to the Arapahoe County Airport.

Shortly thereafter, the pilot stated that he wanted to go to Stapleton International Airport rather than Arapahoe. The aircraft was cleared to 11,000 feet, but the pilot radioed that the aircraft was not able to maintain altitude. About this time, the Denver radar controller offered the pilot of N456L a precision approach radar (PAR) approach to the Buckley Air National Guard Base. The aircraft was not able to reach Buckley and crashed in an open field about 14 miles southeast of the Arapahoe County Airport. There were 10 fatalities.

The pilot of N456L called the Denver Flight Service Station (FSS) at 1020 and requested a weather briefing for a proposed flight from Arapahoe County Airport to Lufkin, Texas, departing at 1330. The weather briefing lasted from 1020 to 1024.

The Safety Board's investigation of the accident disclosed that the lack of priority message handling on the leased service-A high-speed weather data circuit, which serves the Denver FSS, resulted in the omission of an urgent weather message, SIGMET GOLF 1, calling for severe icing in eastern Colorado, from the weather briefing at 1020.

Priority message handling exists only on the low-speed, service-A circuits that originate at the Weather Message Switching Center (WMSC) in Kansas City, Missouri. Therefore, SIGMET GOLF 1 was available over the low-speed, service-A weather data circuit at 1011, 1 minute after it was issued by the National Weather Service (NWS). However, there is no priority message-handling procedure for the leased high-speed service-A weather data circuit, and SIGMET GOLF 1 was not available to the Denver FSS specialist responsible for aviation weather briefings until 1025--too late to include in the briefing of the pilot of N456L. Although both weather data circuits serve the Denver FSS, the leased service-A circuit is used primarily for receiving weather data necessary for weather briefings; the low-speed, service-A circuit serves as a backup.

The leased high-speed, service-A circuit serves not only the Denver FSS but also more than 140 other flight service stations nationwide. In addition, medium- and high-speed weather data circuits that originate at the WMSC at Kansas City serve the meteorological departments of many of the major air carriers as well as other nongovernment users engaged in aviation forecasting and weather briefing.

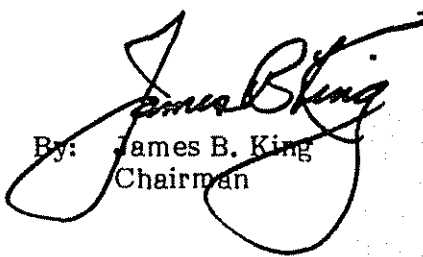
Urgent weather messages contain information pertaining to the safety of all aircraft. Information contained in these messages must be made available immediately to the aviation community. To do so requires the immediate delivery of urgent weather messages to all weather data circuits that originate from the WMSC.

The Safety Board is aware that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) on April 14, 1980, made a temporary format change in the delivery of urgent weather messages to the leased high-speed, service-A weather data circuit. The change provides for the immediate delivery of urgent weather messages to the FSS supervisor's printer. This information is then disseminated by the supervisor to FSS specialists responsible for weather briefings. This format change only affects those flight service stations on the leased service-A circuit and does not affect nongovernment users on other medium- and high-speed circuits. The Safety Board believes that, in the interest of air safety, immediate delivery of urgent weather messages to all circuits that originate at the WMSC at Kansas City is necessary.

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

Develop and implement a priority message-handling procedure to assure the immediate delivery of urgent weather messages to all weather circuits that originate from the Weather Message Switching Center in Kansas City, Missouri. (Class II, Priority Action) (A-81-8)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, GOLDMAN, and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in this recommendation.


By: James B. King
Chairman