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NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: September 20, 1985

Forwarded to:

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Vice President Operations
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SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

A-85-66 and -67

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About 1117:38 Pacific daylight time, on August 24, 1984, Wings West Airlines, Flight 628, a Beech C99, (N6399U) and Aestetec Inc., Rockwell Commander 112TC, N112SM, collided in midair near San Luis Obispo, California. The weather at the time of the collision was clear. Flight 628 had just departed San Luis Obispo County Airport en route to San Francisco International Airport, California, and was climbing on a westbound heading. The Rockwell Commander had departed Paso Robles, California, on a training flight and was descending toward the San Luis Obispo County Airport on an eastbound track. The airplanes collided head-on at an altitude of about 3,400 feet. The wreckage of both airplanes fell into an open field about 8 nmi west northwest of the San Luis Obispo County Airport. All 17 persons, including the 2 pilots and 13 passengers onboard Flight 628 and the 2 pilots onboard the Rockwell, were killed. 1/

The Safety Board's investigation disclosed that the pilots of both airplanes failed to follow the recommended communications and traffic advisory practices for uncontrolled airports contained in the Airman's Information Manual (AIM). The Rockwell Commander, with a certified flight instructor giving an aircraft checkout to another rated pilot, was proceeding inbound to San Luis Obispo County Airport on the localizer course to runway 11. It is possible that the accident might have been avoided if the flightcrew of the Rockwell Commander had informed the Los Angeles Air Route Traffic Control Center (ARTCC) of their intentions, as recommended in the AIM. Under these circumstances, the controller not only would have known of the presence of the Wings West aircraft, he also would have known that the Rockwell Commander's crew intended to fly toward the airport and descend on the localizer course.

1/ For more detailed information, read Aircraft Accident Report -- "Midair Collision of Wings West Airlines Beech C-99 (N6399U) and Aestetec, Inc., Rockwell Commander 112TC, N112SM, near San Luis Obispo, California, August 24, 1984" (NTSB/AAR-85/07).

As a consequence, the controller might have issued an aircraft safety advisory during his first communication with Flight 628 and suggested an alternative course of action for the flightcrew to alter its course well to one side of the localizer.

Further, the AIM recommends that aircraft departing uncontrolled airports monitor the UNICOM frequency until 10 miles from the airport. The investigation disclosed that Flight 628 discontinued monitoring the San Luis Obispo UNICOM frequency when it was only 5 miles from the airport. As a result, flight 628 most likely did not hear the communication, "Inbound approaching Dobra," which was transmitted by the Rockwell Commander. Had the flightcrew of Flight 628 been monitoring the UNICOM, they should have become aware of traffic ahead of them proceeding in the opposite direction toward the airport. Although the time available was limited, both flightcrews then might have made their respective positions and intentions known to each other in time for one or both to take appropriate corrective action. Although it is not possible to determine whether pilot communication on the UNICOM frequency would have alerted each flightcrew of the other aircraft in sufficient time to avoid the accident, the Safety Board believes that the recommended practice serves a valuable safety purpose and that it should be emphasized by the Regional Airline Association and the National Business Aircraft Association, Inc.

It concerns the Safety Board that the flightcrew of Flight 628 elected to wait until they were airborne before communicating with the Los Angeles ARTCC and requesting their IFR clearance albeit VFR conditions prevailed. This decision severely limited the time available to the controller prior to the collision to radar identify the flight, to issue it an IFR clearance, and then to provide radar traffic advisory service. Had the flightcrew of Flight 628 obtained an IFR clearance on the ground, or as a minimum, had they requested a discrete beacon code for radar traffic advisory service, the controller's radar identification task might have been accomplished sooner, and may have shortened the time the controller needed to enter the flight into the IFR system. The Safety Board is aware that many commuter air carrier flights do not utilize radar traffic advisory service when it is available to them. Many such flights are operating at locations which have specific radar programs (i.e., stage II, stage III, etc.), and yet they choose not to participate in them. Although participation in these formal programs is voluntary, the inherent safety enhancement gained by such participation is significant. The Safety Board recognizes that the ability to provide radar traffic advisory service is predicated on factors such as radar tracking limitations, traffic volume, controller workload, and frequency congestion, but believes that nevertheless, commuter air carriers should request radar traffic advisory service where it is available.

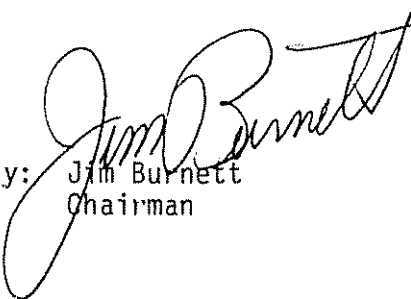
Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Regional Airline Association and the National Business Aircraft Association, Inc.:

Disseminate the facts, conditions, and circumstances of the midair collision at the San Luis Obispo County Airport to members of your organization, urging them to adhere to the recommended traffic advisory practices and the procedures for the conduct of a practice instrument approach at uncontrolled airports in the Airman's Information Manual. (Class II, Priority Action) (A-85-66)

Encourage members of your organization to obtain an instrument flight rules (IFR) clearance, where conditions permit, or assignment of a discrete transponder beacon code with traffic advisory service before departure from an uncontrolled airport. (Class II, Priority Action) (A-85-67)

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency with the statutory responsibility "...to promote transportation safety by conducting independent accident investigations and by formulating safety improvement recommendations" (Public Law 93-633). The Safety Board is vitally interested in any action taken as a result of its safety recommendations. Therefore, it would appreciate a response from you regarding action taken or contemplated with respect to the recommendations in this letter.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, BURSLEY, Member, concurred in these recommendations.


By: Jim Burnett
Chairman