

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: March 14, 1980

Forwarded to:

Honorable Langhorne M. Bond
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
Washington, D.C. 20591

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

A-80-20 and -21

On March 8, 1980, a Swearingen SA-226 AT, N720R, with a crew of two and six passengers, experienced a rapid decompression at 16,000 feet when most of the aft cargo compartment door separated in flight. About 3/4 of the door along with interior furnishings, including an unoccupied passenger seat, separated from the aircraft. Two passengers were injured slightly during the decompression and the empennage was damaged slightly when some of the material from the cargo door or the cabin struck the upper fuselage and the vertical stabilizer. Some of the material from the cabin lodged around the control surfaces in the empennage. A safe landing was made in Albany, New York. Although ground search continues for the separated items, only baggage has thus far been recovered.

The National Transportation Safety Board's on-going investigation indicates that the aircraft was being operated at a pressure differential of approximately 7 psi to maintain an approximate sea level pressure. Preliminary examination of the aircraft indicates that there were static failures of the door's latching mechanism, possibly because the mechanism was adjusted improperly.

A review of the Service Difficulty Reports on this type door showed that there have been 29 reports of various problems, including bent latches, stuck pins, misadjustments, and broken cables. There have been no previous reports of structural problems, failures, or in-flight separations.

There are about 200 of these aircraft in operation and a large number of them are being used in commuter/air taxi operations. The accident aircraft had accumulated about 2,200 hours of operation at the time of the accident.

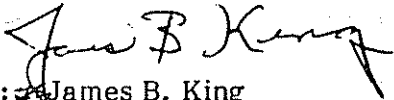
The Safety Board has been advised that the aircraft manufacturer is preparing an Alert Service Bulletin to all owner/operators of this aircraft which will recommend inspection and adjustment, as required, of the door latching mechanism.

In view of the potential for a catastrophic accident, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Aviation Administration:

Issue a telegraphic Airworthiness Directive requiring an immediate inspection of the door latching mechanism of the aft cargo doors on all Swearingen SA-226 aircraft to assure proper adjustment and structural integrity. (Class I, Urgent Action) (A-80-20)

Issue an Airworthiness Directive restricting the cabin pressure differential in Swearingen SA-226 aircraft until the cause of the aft cargo door failure can be determined and an appropriate corrective action carried out. (Class I, Urgent Action) (A-80-21)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, GOLDMAN, and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in these recommendations.


By: James B. King
Chairman