



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594  
Safety Recommendation

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**Date:** May 11, 1994

**In reply refer to:** A-94-111 and A-94-112

Honorable David R. Hinson  
Administrator  
Federal Aviation Administration  
Washington, D.C. 20591

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On April 27, 1994, at 2257,<sup>1</sup> a Piper PA-31-350, N990RA, struck a blast fence during landing rollout on runway 06 at Sikorsky Memorial Airport, Stratford, Connecticut. The flight was operated by JIB Incorporated, doing business as Action Airlines. The flight was operating as a nonscheduled air taxi under the provisions of Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 135. The airplane was destroyed by an immediate ground fire, and the pilot and seven of eight passengers perished. The eighth passenger sustained serious thermal injuries. The flight had departed Atlantic City, New Jersey, about 1 hour before the accident. The pilot filed, but did not activate, an instrument flight rules flight plan. The weather at the time of the accident has not been definitely determined. Although the investigation is continuing, certain serious deficiencies related to the accident airplane have been noted that could affect the airworthiness or postcrash survivability of occupants of other airplanes. The Safety Board believes that the FAA should take immediate action to address these deficiencies.

During the initial examination of the airplane wreckage, the evidence indicated that no occupant of the airplane was using a safety belt at the time of the accident. It also became apparent that the safety belts had been improperly installed

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<sup>1</sup>Eastern daylight time, in accordance with the 24-hour clock.

on several of the passenger seats. Incorrectly sized attachment bolts had been used on the seat frames during reassembly, and some attachment bolts had been found with no associated bushings to allow the belts to swivel on the bolts.

An examination of seats in other Piper PA-31 airplanes operated by Action Airlines revealed numerous safety belt and seat frame attachment anomalies on almost every seat. Safety belts were attached to nonapproved locations, which resulted in the belts being at an incorrect angle when fastened. Some belts were installed so that their webbing originated beneath the seat pans. Both conditions were not in accordance with Piper-approved engineering drawings. Other anomalies included nonstandard parts and missing, but required, parts associated with the safety belts and seat frames.

The interiors of the accident airplane and others operated by Action Airlines had been recently refurbished by Harrington Industries of Aiken, South Carolina. This company is not a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)-approved repair station. However, FAA-certified airframe and powerplant (A & P) mechanics who work for the company routinely sign off repair documents and are surveilled by FAA inspectors. The president and two mechanics hold A & P certificates. In addition to refurbishing airplane interiors, the company also paints airplanes.

Following the investigative activity in Connecticut, the investigative team traveled to South Carolina to interview Harrington Industries personnel and to examine their repair facility. Employees acknowledged using the above-mentioned parts and techniques during the refurbishment of airplane interiors. Nonstandard parts were found in their parts bins. The person who is responsible for the complete disassembly and reassembly of newly upholstered seats, including the installation of safety belts, is not an A & P mechanic, but rather was previously employed as an automobile mechanic. This individual acknowledged that he had received no training on the disassembly and reassembly of airplane seats. Further, he was unaware of maintenance manual instructions and the need to use aviation quality hardware. The A & P mechanics who signed off the work orders acknowledged that they had not examined the work performed on the safety belt attachments, the reassembly of seats, and their installation in the airplane. Piper Service Bulletins and maintenance manuals for other airplanes that had been refurbished or repainted were found to be out of date by as much as 23 years. Lastly, company personnel acknowledged that they had not properly rebalanced control surfaces, as required, after they were repainted.

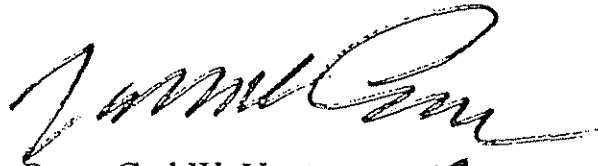
Harrington Industries has been in the aircraft refurbishment and airplane painting business for about 20 years. Interviews and records dating back 5 years revealed that the company has refurbished or repainted 12 to 15 airplanes per month. The records showed that the airplanes had been certificated under 14 CFR, Parts 23 and 25, and that they had been operated under 14 CFR, Parts 91 and 135.

As a result of its investigation of this accident, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Aviation Administration:

Take immediate action to evaluate the quality of maintenance performed by Harrington Industries, including the qualifications of the FAA-certified airframe and powerplant mechanics employed there, to ensure that the work performed is in compliance with approved practices. (Class I, Urgent Action) (A-94-111)

Take immediate action to identify airplanes that have been repaired, refurbished, or repainted by Harrington Industries, inspect their safety belts and seat assemblies for proper installation and use of approved hardware, inspect their flight control surfaces to ensure that balance is within tolerance limitations, and inspect them for any other airworthiness conditions if the need is indicated during the evaluation described in recommendation A-94-111. (Class I, Urgent Action) (A-94-112)

Chairman VOGT, Vice Chairman HALL, and Members LAUBER, and HAMMERSCHMIDT concurred in these recommendations.

  
By: Carl W. Vogt  
Chairman 