

C E R T A L E R T

ADVISORY * CAUTIONARY * NON-DIRECTIVE

FOR INFORMATION, CONTACT CERTIFICATION BRANCH, AAS-310 267.8728

DATE: October 1, 1995

NO. 95-05

TO: AIRPORT CERTIFICATION PROGRAM INSPECTORS
TOPIC: CLOSING AND OPENING THE AIRPORT AFTER
AN ACCIDENT OR INCIDENT

In July 1994, a DC-9 collided with trees just outside the airport boundary, shortly after executing the missed approach. There were injuries and fatalities as a result of the post-crash fire. Because ARFF equipment and personnel were off-airport, there were questions concerning the reopening of the airport to operations.

Citing this accident and another accident still under investigation, the Safety Board stated that failure to assess field conditions properly, i.e., with respect to the availability of ARFF equipment and personnel; the location of the accident; the rescue, evacuation, and movement of those involved in the accident, and the ensuing disruption of normal activities on the airfield that precipitated airport closure; creates the potential for additional injury to others as well as for another equally catastrophic event. NTSB has issued Recommendation A-95-78, requiring that FAA:

Provide guidance to all 14 CFR 139 certificated airports that in the event of an accident or significant incident, the airport be closed immediately by either the airport operator and/or the appropriate FAA air traffic facilities through letters of agreement with airport operators. Also, specify that the airport, or portions thereof, should not be reopened until the airport operator has ensured that: (1) aircraft operating areas are secure; (2) aircraft movement areas that are to be reopened have been properly inspected; and (3) adequate aircraft rescue and fire fighting protection is available for aircraft operations.

The opening or closure of an airfield or portion thereof is the responsibility of the airport operator. However, in the fast developing dynamics that occur immediately after an accident or incident, the airport operator may not be in the best position to assess the situation and make a decision on continuing operations or closing the airfield. To ensure the safety of airfield operations, it may be beneficial to establish procedures with airport traffic control tower which give the authority for closing the airfield to controllers under defined circumstances and

guidelines. This can be accomplished through a Letter of Agreement with the Air Traffic Control Tower. Such procedures must provide safeguards to ensure that airport operations are continued or resumed only after it is determined that there **is** no an adverse effect on persons or property on the airfield and that appropriate level of ARFF coverage is available. In addition, operations should resume (1) only after it can be ascertained that the rescue and evacuation activities associated with the event will not be impacted negatively by resumption of airfield operation, and (2) the accident event does not pose a hazard to the resumption of airfield operations.

Because these kinds of plans must be formulated as part of the Emergency Plan for the airport and require cooperation and coordination of various airport interests, the importance of advance preparation cannot be overemphasized.

This Certalert will be sent to the American Association of Airport Executives and the Airports Council International for distribution to their members.

O/S Robert E. David

Manager, Airport Safety and Operations

Date

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