

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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(202) 426-8787

ISSUED: August 13, 1976

Forwarded to:

Honorable John L. McLucas
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
Washington, D. C. 20591

} SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

A-76-120

The National Transportation Safety Board has learned that the provisions of 14 CFR 121.318, which require an operational public address (p. a.) system aboard airplanes with a seating capacity of more than 19 passengers, are being negated by modifications to aircraft master minimum equipment lists (MMEL). The Safety Board does not believe that continued flight with an inoperative p. a. system is in the interest of safety, and we believe that action should be taken to prevent such operation.

The Safety Board previously has issued recommendations to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regarding p. a. systems (CY-70-55, A-71-45, A-72-141, and A-75-106). In fact, during its investigation of the Overseas National Airways DC-9 accident near St. Croix on May 2, 1970, the Safety Board found that several persons died because they were not warned in time to prepare for ditching. The p. a. system on that aircraft was not operative, and it was not required to be operable by the Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR) or by the MMEL for that aircraft. As a result, the Safety Board recommended that p. a. systems be operable on all flights which require that passengers be briefed on emergency procedures. The FAA responded by issuing Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) 72-6 which evolved into amendment No. 121-105, making the p. a. system mandatory after September 8, 1975, (14 CFR 121.318).

With regard to the need for operational p. a. systems, the FAA stated in NPRM 72-6 that it has ... "become increasingly aware of the dangers inherent in large passenger-carrying aircraft which are not equipped with, or which do not have properly operating public address and intercom systems which serve to keep passengers and crewmembers apprised of necessary information prior to and during the emergency." It also stated that a p. a. system provides invaluable assistance in times of an emergency. The Safety Board agrees with this rationale for an operational p. a. system.

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A review of several MMELs of passenger aircraft has revealed inconsistencies regarding p. a. systems. For example, the MMELs for the Boeing 707/720 and 747 aircraft state that the p. a. system must be operable from the cockpit and at least one flight attendant station at all times, and that the aircraft may continue flight or a series of flights with other portions of the system inoperative for a maximum of 25 flight-hours; however, it may not depart a station where repairs or replacement can be made.

On the other hand, the MMELs for the Boeing 727, DC-9, and DC-10 aircraft permit the p. a. system to be inoperative if the interphone system is operative. There is no restriction on the number of flight-hours that the system may remain inoperative nor does it prohibit departure from a station where repairs or replacement can be made. Furthermore, the Safety Board has learned that guidance has been provided by the Chief, Air Carrier Division (AFS-200), of the FAA to the Chairmen of the Flight Operations Evaluation Boards to standardize all MMELs to permit flight with either the p. a. system or the intercom inoperative. There was no restriction included in this guidance on the number of flight-hours permitted or when maintenance must be performed.

The Safety Board is cognizant of the purpose of permitting operations with certain equipment inoperative when other equipment or factors compensate to provide an acceptable level of safety. However, based on the Board investigations of accidents in which lives have been lost because passengers could not be warned via a p. a. system, the Safety Board believes that passenger-carrying flights dispatched with inoperative p. a. systems do not afford an acceptable level of safety to those on board.

In view of the above, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Aviation Administration:

Require that the MMELs of passenger-carrying airplanes be standardized to require that the p. a. system be operable from the cockpit and from at least one flight attendant station at all times. (Class I - Urgent Followup) (A76-120)

TODD, Chairman, BAILEY, Vice-Chairman, McADAMS, HOGUE, and HALEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendation.

Kay Bailey
for

By: Webster B. Todd, Jr.
Chairman

THIS RECOMMENDATION WILL BE RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC ON THE ISSUE DATE SHOWN ABOVE. NO PUBLIC DISSEMINATION OF THIS DOCUMENT SHOULD BE MADE PRIOR TO THAT DATE.