

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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(202) 426-8787

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

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

A-76-15 & 16

On November 12, 1975, an Overseas National Airways, Inc., (ONA) DC-10 caught fire during an aborted takeoff at the John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York. The National Transportation Safety Board's investigation of this accident has revealed that an unsafe seatbelt restraint system is being used on rearward-facing flight attendant seats on the DC-10 aircraft.

In this accident, a flight attendant who was seated in a rearward-facing jumpseat and restrained by a dual retractor seatbelt, was thrown from her seat. In another recent ONA accident at Istanbul, Turkey, three flight attendants, who were using the same type of restraint system, also were thrown from their seats.

The dual-retractor, seatbelt restraint system is manufactured by American Safety, Inc., and consists of two seat-mounted belt retractors, each of which contains a spring-loaded belt. The belts must be pulled from the retractors and fastened together with a metal-to-metal buckle. When each belt has been extended 7 to 10 inches, a locking mechanism in the retractors engages to prevent further extension after belt motion stops. Even though the belts are fastened, when either belt retracts to within the first 7 to 10 inches the locking mechanism releases. That belt section can then be extended to its maximum length of about 19 inches.

The Safety Board's investigation disclosed that each belt section must be extended past the first 7 to 10 inches in order for the system to provide restraint. In addition, the Board found that one belt section could be extended around the user and fastened without extending the other section and that no restraint would be provided. A physically small person restrained by a properly fastened seatbelt could move back in the seat and allow the seatbelt sections to retract to within the 7- to 10-inch extension zone and thereby cause the mechanical locks to release.

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The Safety Board believes that with this restraint system, restraints could be lost during a minor crash landing and that incapacitating injuries could result.

Our staff has been in contact with the manufacturer of the restraint system; the manufacturer has initiated action to correct the situation. However, the Safety Board believes that this matter should also be acted on immediately by the FAA.

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

1. Rescind the Technical Standard Order (TSO) approving the American Safety, Inc., dual retractor restraint system until it is modified so that the seatbelt cannot release inadvertently. (Class I - Urgent Followup)
2. Issue an AD to prohibit the use of all rearward-facing flight attendant seats on DC-10 aircraft until the deficiencies of the restraint systems are corrected or until a suitable alternate restraint system is installed. (Class I - Urgent Followup)

TODD, Chairman, McADAMS, THAYER, BURGESS, and HALEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendations.


By Webster B. Todd, Jr.
Chairman

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