



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594
Safety Recommendation

Date: May 31, 1991

In reply refer to: A-91-39

Honorable James B. Busey
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
Washington, D.C. 20591

On December 3, 1990, at 1345 EST, Northwest Airlines Flight 299, a Boeing B-727, and Northwest Flight 1482, a McDonnell Douglas DC-9, collided near the intersection of runways 3C/21C and 9/27 at Detroit Metropolitan/Wayne County Airport, Detroit, Michigan. The B-727 was taking off from runway 3C, and the DC-9 had taxied onto that runway just prior to the accident. Visibility at the time was reported to have been 1/4 mile in fog. One flight attendant and seven passengers onboard the DC-9 were killed; there were no injuries to the persons onboard the B-727.

During the Safety Board's continuing investigation of this accident, air carrier and commercial pilots who were awaiting takeoff and airport fire fighters who responded to the B-727 and DC-9 stated that the centerline lights were not illuminated on Runway 3C/21C. The on-duty Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Air Traffic Control Tower Supervisor stated that the runway 3C/21C edge lights and centerline lights were on and set at their maximum intensities (Step 5) at the time of the accident.

FAA Advisory Circular 150/5345-3D, dated August 8, 1986, in part states: ". . . rotary switches, used for the control of runway and taxiway lighting, shall have three to six detent positions with one, two, or more poles as required to turn regulators on and off (optional) and control lighting circuits with up to five steps of brightness. The switches shall have a minimum angular throw of 30 degrees between detents and be equipped with a stop to prevent rotation past the last position and continuous rotation in either direction."

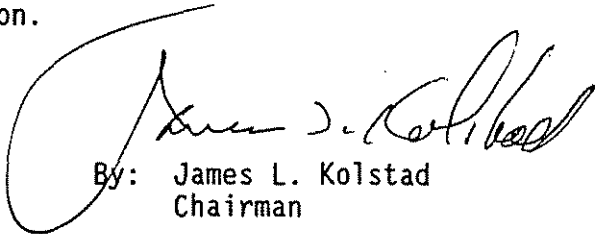
Inspection of the airport lighting control panel found that the rotary switch that controlled the intensity of centerline lights on runway 3C/21C did not have a stop past the last position, i.e., the Step 5 position. The Safety Board believes that the absence of a stop could result in the inadvertent rotation of the switch control knob past the Step 5 position to a lower lighting intensity.

The Safety Board believes that the potential for inadvertent reduction of any part of the intensity levels of airfield lighting during low-visibility conditions is a serious concern.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Aviation Administration:

Require the inspection of all airport lighting panel rotary switches to ensure that they comply with the FAA specifications outlined in AC 150/5345-3D, dated August 8, 1985. (Class II, Priority Action)(A-91-39)

Chairman KOLSTAD, Vice Chairman COUGHLIN, and Members LAUBER, BURNETT, and HART concurred in this recommendation.



By: James L. Kolstad
Chairman