



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

109# 2021

Date: December 8, 1987

In reply refer to: A-87-114

Honorable T. Allan McArtor
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
Washington, D.C. 20591

On March 31, 1987, about 0958 local time, a Cessna 172 that had departed Metropolitan Oakland International Airport (OAK) collided with a Piper PA-32 cargo flight that was cleared to land at the airport. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed. The collision occurred at an approximate altitude of 1,000 feet msl, about 1 mile north of the departure end of runway 33. The airplanes were destroyed, all three persons on the airplanes were killed, and one person on the ground was injured as a result of the collision. ^{1/}

The National Transportation Safety Board believes that because of the daytime, visual meteorological conditions, the pilots of the Cessna and the Piper should have been able to see and avoid each other in time to avoid the accident, and their failure to do so was a primary cause of the accident. However, the Safety Board examined several factors that may have directly or indirectly affected the safe operation of the airplanes, including the absence of Bright Radar Indicator Tower Equipment (BRITE) during a period of moderate traffic activity.

The Safety Board recognizes the need to regularly perform routine maintenance on items such as the BRITE equipment. However, on the day of the accident, technicians at OAK performed maintenance on the BRITE during a period of moderate traffic activity and as a result, the BRITE was out of service at the time of the accident. The Safety Board questions the wisdom of a policy that allowed control towers to be closed during periods of light traffic and open during periods of heavier traffic, but, when the towers were open, removed critical equipment from service for maintenance that could have been performed when the towers were closed. The Safety Board recognizes that controllers may be able to perform basic duties and responsibilities effectively without using BRITE, and that BRITE is not required tower equipment; however, when such equipment is available and used over a period of time, controllers often depend on the information it provides and as a result, the BRITE should have been considered an integral piece of equipment at that facility. Without the BRITE, the ability of the controllers to locate specific aircraft may have deteriorated since they regularly used the equipment for that purpose. Thus, the absence of the BRITE may explain why the OAK tower controller issued landing clearance to the Piper without first visually confirming his position. It may also explain why the controller did not advise the Cessna that traffic was "reported" over the green tank, (a visual reporting point for OAK north field operations), information that he could have easily provided without the presence of the BRITE.

^{1/} For more detailed information, read Aviation Accident Report--"North Star Aviation, Inc., PA-32, N39614, and Alameda Aero Club, Cessna 172, N75584, Midair Collision, Oakland, California, March 31, 1987" (NTSB/AAR-87/09).

The Safety Board concludes that the decision to remove the BRITE from service during a period of moderate traffic activity for routine, easily scheduled maintenance that could have been performed when the tower was not in operation was faulty and contributed to the accident. The Safety Board urges the Federal Aviation Administration, at air traffic control facilities that are closed at regular intervals, to schedule routine maintenance on critical pieces of equipment only during periods when the facility using that equipment is closed.

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

At air traffic control facilities that are closed at regular intervals, schedule routine maintenance on critical pieces of equipment only during periods when the facility using that equipment is closed.
(Class II, Priority Action) (A-87-114)

Also as a result of its investigation, the Safety Board issued Safety Recommendation A-87-115 to the National Association of State Aviation Officials, the Airport Operators Council International, and the American Association of Airport Executives.

BURNETT, Chairman, GOLDMAN, Vice Chairman, and NALL and KOLSTAD, Members, concurred in this recommendation. LAUBER, Member, did not participate.


By: Jim Burnett
Chairman