

THE AIR ACCIDENTS INVESTIGATION BRANCH

The Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB), is an independent part of the Department for Transport. It is not part of the Civil Aviation Authority. It is responsible for the investigation of civil aircraft accidents and serious incidents within the UK. It also assists in UK military accidents and investigations abroad. Its headquarters is at Farnborough in Hampshire.

Authority for the AAIB to investigate accidents originates from the Civil Aviation Act; Civil Aviation (Investigation of Air Accidents) Regulations.

The Chief Inspector of Air Accidents reports directly to the Secretary of State.

WHY INVESTIGATE?

The purpose of any investigation is to determine the circumstances and causes of the accident and to make safety recommendations, if necessary, with a view to the preservation of life and the avoidance of accidents in the future. It is not to apportion blame or liability. The AAIB is not a regulatory authority and therefore cannot enforce its recommendations.

WHEN AN ACCIDENT OCCURS

As soon as the AAIB Duty Co-ordinator has been notified of an accident his initial actions are to liaise with the Police, Emergency Services, Air Traffic Control and the Aircraft Operator to ensure that evidence associated with the accident is impounded and secured. He will normally dispatch an Operations and an Engineering Inspector to the crash site to conduct the investigation. Access to the accident site is strictly controlled by the police.

The Operations Inspector, an experienced professional pilot, will examine for example flying procedures and techniques; human factors; aircraft performance; survivability; weather; airfields; air traffic control and witness information etc.

The Engineering Inspector, an experienced aeronautical engineer, will examine for example the aircraft airworthiness; systems; engines; structure; failure and fault analysis; maintenance procedures, records and documentation etc.

THE POWERS OF AN INSPECTOR

Inspectors have powers to take signed statements from anyone involved directly or indirectly with the accident. They can remove and retain all relevant books, papers, documents or articles and can have access to and inspect any place, building or aircraft for the purposes of completing their enquiries.

THE INVESTIGATION

The Field Phase of the investigation begins at the accident site.

The Engineering Inspectors are responsible for the wreckage and the safety of the site. They will photograph and record all the evidence on the ground and later examine the aircraft log books and maintenance records. They may then arrange for the aircraft wreckage, components and other relevant material evidence to be removed and transported to the AAIB Headquarters at Farnborough, or some other secure area, where they can carry out further examination and testing.

Wreckage not required for examination is the responsibility of the owner, his estate or the aircraft insurers. Personal effects not relevant to the investigation will be handed to the police for safe custody.

The Operations Inspector will obtain statements from witnesses who saw or heard the accident, and will continue his enquiries with a view to determining the sequence of events that led up to the accident.

The Inspectors may visit both the airfield of departure and intended destination, taking statements when required from people who came into contact with the pilot before the flight. They will obtain records relating to the pilot's training and experience and, if appropriate, company documents relating to the aircraft's operation. Data concerning airfield operations will be obtained if the accident has occurred during the takeoff, approach or landing phase of flight.

Sometimes the Inspectors will need to talk to the pilot's next of kin to learn about his or her background or to look at professional documents or certificates which might be kept at home. This will never be easy for either side but the Inspectors will always contact the families before visiting. Such meetings allow the next of kin to meet the Inspectors personally and question them about the handling and progress of the investigation.

When the Inspectors return to the AAIB HQ they present their initial findings to the Chief Inspector of Air Accidents. The Chief Inspector then decides how the investigation will proceed and the form of report appropriate to the type and seriousness of the accident or incident.

When the cause of an accident involving loss of life is not readily apparent, people and the media often speculate about what happened. For the next of kin, this can be very distressing.

The Chief Inspector attaches great importance to keeping the next of kin informed about the known facts of the investigation. They are therefore always welcome to talk to those conducting the investigation to learn of its progress. When appropriate, arrangements can be made to provide a private briefing to the next of kin and close family before the report is published.

THE REPORT

A report on the investigation can take several months to produce. At first sight this might seem a long time but it may be necessary to interview a wide range of individuals, cross-check evidence, examine suspect equipment and consult technical experts. Often the actual cause of an accident turns out to be very different from the convenient solution identified by the media in the immediate aftermath of a tragedy.

The report will protect the anonymity of the persons involved and, if appropriate, contain safety recommendations. A **draft copy** of the report will be sent to the pilot, or his or her representative, and to those persons or organisations whose reputations may be adversely affected by the report. They will be allowed 28 days to make representations before the report is finalised.

A copy of the **final report** will be sent to those persons and organisations before it is published. Reports will also be made available on the AAIB Internet web site on the day of publication at:

www.aaib.gov.uk

INQUIRIES OR INQUESTS INTO THE ACCIDENT

Her Majesty's Coroner or Procurator Fiscal (if the accident occurred in Scotland) normally hold an inquest or fatal accident inquiry for deaths occurring in unusual circumstances. These court proceedings can often occur many months after the accident and often attract renewed media interest.

The AAIB Inspectors prepare statements for the courts and are normally required to appear at the Inquest or Inquiry as expert witnesses. A date for the inquest or Fatal Accident Inquiry will be decided upon by the courts once those statements and other evidence have been received.

The Coroner's Officer, who can be contacted through the local police station, or Procurator Fiscal's office should be contacted on all matters relating to the Inquest or Fatal Accident Inquiry and for the return of personal effects.

INSPECTORS INVESTIGATING THIS ACCIDENT ARE:

Operations:

Engineering:

FURTHER QUESTIONS?

If you need any further information on the progress of the investigation or on any other matter relating to the contact the Inspectors concerned at:

**Air Accidents Investigation Branch
Berkshire Copse Road
Aldershot
Hants
GU11 2HH**

**Telephone: 01252 510300
Fax: 01252 376999**

NOTES

THE INVESTIGATION

OF ACCIDENTS TO

GENERAL AVIATION

AIRCRAFT

AAIB

