

AIRCRAFT CRASH SCENES

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I. BACKGROUND

Prior to the arrival of personnel from the National Transportation Safety Board. (NTSB), and FAA, the initial tasks such as locating the crash scene, rescuing occupants, preserving the wreckage, notifying appropriate authorities and dealing with the news media will usually fall to the municipal police department in whose jurisdiction the crash occurred. It is the policy of this department to assist in aircraft crash search and rescue and to provide accident scene security and coordination for crashes occurring within the geographical boundaries of this community.

It is not possible to formulate precise procedures which will cover every type of aircraft crash. Some military crashes may require procedures which are beyond the scope of this document. Similarly, while overall objectives remain the same, the response to a major airline crash will be much more complicated than that involving a single engine aircraft.

II. POLICY

The health and safety of survivors is the most pressing concern when responding to an aircraft crash scene. The precise role played by officers will depend upon a variety of factors.

Police, Fire and EMS shall be simultaneously dispatched to assure a unified response to what are most often complicated incidents with a variety of response considerations.

Officers arriving at the scene before Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel should provide first aid consistent with their training, if safe to do so. However, substantial consideration shall be given specific to Fire Suppression, Extrication, Hazardous Materials, and Explosion.

Notification of appropriate department, state and federal officials should be arranged promptly through dispatch.

Officers should establish a perimeter and crash scene security and preserve the wreckage. Only those persons should be admitted who are needed for occupant treatment and removal, firefighting, and the possible removal of cargo when necessary to protect it from further damage.

The possible presence of hazardous material cargo should be considered and, as appropriate, trained HAZMAT personnel should be summoned.

Documentation of the crash scene should be made. Photographs and video are most helpful and should only be obtained by law enforcement personnel. Written notation of the position of survivors and fatalities should be made. Early communication not to film or photograph the scene shall be made to all responders to minimize any social media sharing of the incident.

Responding Officers shall establish perimeter security of the crash site along with a Staging Area, Command Post and Media Staging Area. No Media shall be allowed to photograph or film the crash site until NTSB, MSP or FAA allows such activity.

III. PROCEDURE

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD (NTSB)

Once the appropriate official from the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) arrives, that individual is in charge. This department will continue to provide services, consistent with its resources, to the NTSB investigator-in-charge as requested.

The preemptive authority of the NTSB is contained in 49 CFR Ch. VII, s. 831.8 as follows:

The designated (NTSB) investigator-in-charge organizes, conducts, and controls the field phase of (aircraft accident) investigation. They shall assume responsibility for the supervision and coordination of all resources and of the activities of all personnel, both Board and non-Board, involved in the on-site investigation.

MASSACHUSETTS AERONAUTICS COMMISSION (MAC)

While the Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission (MAC) has “general supervision and control over aeronautics” (M.G.L. c. 90, s.39), the MAC usually does not conduct aircraft investigations on its own. Rather, it provides notification and assistance to the NTSB as appropriate.

When so requested, the department will “assist and cooperate with the commission” in the enforcement of laws in its jurisdiction as required by M.G.L. c. 90, s. 40 (par.3)

COORDINATION WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

It is likely that more than one law enforcement agency will have jurisdiction over any alleged criminal activity. When a crash occurs at any location in Williamstown, the Williamstown Police Department assumes crash site supervision in conjunction with/until arrival of the State Police.

The Williamstown Police Department will be the lead investigating authority in conjunction with the State Police until the arrival of NTSB. Williamstown Police Department will utilize Unified Command to assure life safety interventions, fire suppression, environmental preservation, and incident stabilization are completed in a manner that lessens the impact of the incident while maintaining scene security. It is important to focus on the needs of the survivors and the objectives of crash scene preservation.

NOTIFICATION

Upon becoming aware of an aircraft crash in the community, the dispatch center will follow established procedures for notifying appropriate police officials, including the chief of police/lieutenant, Mass State Police as well as fire, medical, and rescue agencies. In addition, as appropriate, the dispatch center will provide notice to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the National transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and the Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission. (MAC)

At a minimum, the above agencies will need to know:

- The plane number and model.
- What the aircraft was carrying.
- The extent of any injuries.

RESCUE OPERATIONS

Prior to the arrival of medical and rescue personnel, officers should assess the situation and render such assistance as appropriate. Depending upon the circumstances, this may include providing first aid commensurate with an officer's level of training.

Extrication of victims from the aircraft wreckage should be accomplished in as orderly fashion as possible. Some survivors may have already left the wreckage and the officers should attempt to document the identity, condition and whereabouts of such individuals.

Officers should record, as soon as possible, their observations. This should include the location of all passengers before and after the crash, their condition and statements. Notation should be made of the condition and location of any debris with particular attention to any items of wreckage which were moved during the rescue. The use of video recorders and the taking of photographs by or on behalf of the department is encouraged.

Until the NTSB investigator arrives, officers should leave the dead bodies of any accident victims as they were found in the wreckage. If circumstances require the movement of such bodies, officers should attempt to document with sketches, photographs and video recordings if available, the positions of the victims' bodies relative to the wreckage, noting seating (with numbers if used) especially. The location of bodies found away from the wreckage should be documented and marked. Placing a stake or evidence marker at such location and recording the victim and any seat number as appropriate. Evidence markers are stored in the booking area.

The identification of victims will be facilitated if officers arrange to have an identifying label attached to any victims' bodies stating where they were found and, if known, in which seat. This will also assist in the accident investigation. Where survivors, victims or wreckage have been moved prior to an officer's arrival, an effort should be made to determine their previous

location. Written and photographic records again are helpful. Likewise, any disturbance of the wreckage or removal of persons, bodies or cargo during the rescue phase should be documented.

Once the rescue phase has been completed, officers should attempt to reduce the disturbance of any wreckage or wreckage trail. This will include restricting access by survivors, their families, news media and ambulance or rescue vehicles. The successful investigation of the cause of the crash often depends on the preservation of as much of the wreckage as possible in its original location.

GUARDING AIRCRAFT WRECKAGE

Officers may be assigned to provide on-going security of aircraft wreckage. Often this will be at the request of an NTSB Investigator-In-Charge. In deploying such officers, care should be taken to determine the presence of dangerous cargo. Where radioactive materials, explosives, ammunition, corrosive liquids, gaseous materials, poisons or bacterial cultures are present, special precautions must be taken to place any guards at a safe distance from the wreckage. This is especially important following a fire at the crash site. The use of perimeter markings (tape or stakes) is recommended.

Guards should provide the following services:

- preserve the scene and protect property
- prevent the disturbance of the wreckage (both bodies and aircraft contents)
- admit only persons authorized by the Investigator-In-Charge (or a superior officer before such Investigator arrives) and
- preserve any ground marks made by the aircraft where possible.

In major crash situation, admission passes or badges may be issued to persons authorized to enter the crash site perimeter.

Residents should be encouraged to report – but not disturb – the discovery of pieces of aircraft wreckage.

PROVIDING ACCESS TO RESCUERS

Officers should attempt to provide rescuers and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel with access to any victims as quickly as possible. Where the crash occurs in a developed area, this may involve traffic control and setting up

a crash scene perimeter. Should a crash occur in wooded or remote areas, it may be necessary to arrange for the clearing of an access way. Officers should inform the dispatch center of any equipment or personnel needed for such work.

PRECAUTIONS AGAINST FIRE

There is a high risk of fire associated with most aircraft crashes. Through Unified Command, the Fire Chief or their designee shall complete a scene assessment and make a determination for fire suppression and rescue efforts based on resources and current policies and procedures.

Defueling should be considered if the aircraft's fuel tanks are still intact. This can be accomplished either by or under the supervision of the fire department. The dispatch center should be contacted if a fuel hauler is required. Be sure to record the amount of fuel removed from each tank and note the tank's dimensions and location.

Caution should be used whenever there has been a large spillage of fuel. Care should be taken not to move parts of the wreckage which might ignite a fire. Likewise, the operation of radio or electrical equipment or the use of salvage equipment should be avoided until the risk of fire has been addressed and their use has been determined safe under the circumstances.

PRECAUTION WITH DANGEROUS CARGO

Officers should arrange for (or, if capable, undertake themselves) a determination of whether the aircraft was carrying any dangerous cargo. The dispatch center should attempt to contact the aircraft operator's agent to review the flight manifest or other documentation identifying dangerous cargo. Special caution should be taken with military aircraft. Dangerous cargo and explosives may be present.

Where radioactive cargo is involved, properly trained personnel should make arrangements for its removal. Officers should be aware that the packaging of radioactive cargo generally is sufficient to withstand most crashes. However, where a fire is also involved, the package and shielding may be damaged and extra caution is warranted. Heat may change radioactive isotopes into a gas which may be carried downwind of the crash site.

All personnel participating in the rescue phase of the crash where a fire occurs and radioactive isotopes are present should be checked, decontaminated, and placed under appropriate medical observation.

CAUTION: No examination of the wreckage should be undertaken until an expert has checked the scene following a fire where radioactive cargo was present.

CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS

As a rule of thumb, it is worthwhile for an officer to treat an aircraft crash site as a possible crime scene. This will help assure that concerns for preservation and access by non-essential personnel are addressed.