



Friday, May 25, 2007

NTSB testifies to Senate on Rail Safety Issues

On May 22, Vice Chairman Robert Sumwalt testified before the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation subcommittee overseeing railroad issues. The Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety and Security Subcommittee is currently considering "Rail Safety Reauthorization."

In his opening remarks, the vice chairman discussed several rail safety issues that are important to the Safety Board including: train crew fatigue, the lack of positive train control systems, and improper switch positions in non-signaled (dark) territory.

Vice Chairman Sumwalt emphasized the Safety Board's position that "a comprehensive fatigue management program is needed" instead of legislation that would "address specific elements of employee fatigue." He advised that it would be best for the FRA to promulgate regulations that can be modified as industry conditions evolve.

In regard to positive train control, he stated, "In the past 10 years, the Safety Board has investigated 52 rail accidents that likely would have been prevented by the installation of a positive train control system. Although we are encouraged with the efforts by some railroads, we note that Positive Train Control systems are needed across the entire country."

Chairman Rosenker Addresses ITSA Annual Meeting

Chairman Mark Rosenker led the NTSB delegation to this year's International Transportation Safety Association (ITSA) annual meeting in Ottawa, Canada on May 14-17. Also in attendance were the Chairmen and representatives from Australia, Canada, the Commonwealth of Independent States, Finland, India, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom. Issues discussed at the meeting included ways to stimulate reductions in road safety accidents, methods to address operator fatigue, information management, and investigator training. Updates on IMO, EASA, and the European Union Group of Experts were also provided. Lessons learned from a number of accidents in all modes were provided. Chairman Rosenker, Tom Doyle, Tom Haueter, Joe Osterman, and Elaine Weinstein attended the meeting and are pictured to the right, along with other ITSA Members.



Vice Chairman Applauds Safety Initiative of Regional Air Cargo Carriers



On May 17, Vice Chairman Robert Sumwalt spoke at the spring conference for the Regional Air Cargo Carriers Association (RACCA) in Scottsdale, Arizona.

In his remarks, the vice chairman noted, "A few years ago, the regional cargo industry was being portrayed in an unfavorable light." He added, "Today, RACCA is trying to take an industry whose reputation may have been somewhat misunderstood, somewhat tarnished, and really pull that industry up by the bootstraps."

The vice chairman praised the RACCA safety initiative and challenged the organization to continue to improve the safety of their industry. Throughout his statement, he stressed the importance of establishing and maintaining a "safety culture" and hosted a break-out session the same day to discuss how management can develop such a culture. He also called attention to the recent NTSB safety recommendation that calls for the FAA to require that all Part 121 operators establish Safety Management System (SMS) programs, adding that, "the backbone of SMS is the establishment and maintenance of a safety culture."

Marine Safety Investigation of the P/V Empress of the North



Passenger Vessel Empress of the North

At about 1:30 am ADT, May 14, 2007, the passenger vessel EMPRESS OF THE NORTH struck a shoal approximately 50 nautical miles southwest of Juneau, Alaska, suffering significant underwater damage. At the time of the accident, 206 passengers and 75 crew members were aboard. All persons but essential crew members were successfully evacuated without injuries, and the vessel returned to safe harbor near Juneau at approximately 10am.

The NTSB Office of Marine Safety immediately launched an investigative team, led by investigator-in-charge Brian Curtis, to Juneau, arriving that same evening. NTSB Board Member Kitty Higgins, and Member Higgins' Special Assistant, Denise Daniels, accompanied the team. Other NTSB personnel on the investigative team were: Barry Strauch, Liam LaRue, Morgan Turrell and Christopher Julius (from the NTSB Office of Marine Safety), and Keith Holloway (from the NTSB Office of Public Affairs). The on-scene team was also provided excellent support by United States Coast Guard personnel in Washington DC and Juneau.

The Operations/Human Performance Group completed its on-scene work in Juneau on May 18th, the Survival Factors Group completed its on-scene work in Juneau on May 20th, and the Engineering Group completed its on-scene work on May 24th after documenting the damage to the vessel in dry dock in Ketchikan, Alaska.

Member Hersman Discusses Boating Safety And Tours Customs Facility

Member Hersman traveled to Katherine's Landing on Lake Mohave in Nevada to observe an Operating Under the Influence (OUI) checkpoint on May 5, at which 177 boats were stopped and 6 people were arrested for operating recreational boats while under the influence of alcohol. Member Hersman also gave a presentation about the Safety Board's advocacy efforts for boating safety when she addressed a conference of the Western States Boat Administrator Association in Laughlin, Nevada on May 7. Bill Gossard of SR-30 accompanied her to both events and helped prepare her presentation.

After leaving Nevada, Member Hersman traveled to Sierra Vista, Arizona, near the Mexican border, on May 9 to receive a briefing and a tour of the Custom and Border Patrol (CBP) facility there. She was briefed on the unmanned aircraft (UAS) operations there. She then traveled to Tucson to give a presentation on May 10 at the annual Corporate Aviation Safety Seminar (CASS), sponsored by the Flight Safety Foundation and the National Business Aviation Association. Her presentation included information about recent Safety Board investigations of aviation accidents and the Board's recent forum on runway incursions. John DeLisi, AS-10, helped prepare her presentation and accompanied Member Hersman to the seminar. Sandy Rowlett of AS-30 provided the runway incursion presentation.

Member Higgins Visits NetJets

On Monday, May 21, 2007, Member Kitty Higgins visited with executives of NetJets at the company's corporate headquarters in Columbus, Ohio. More than 20 executives -- from representatives of the pilot union safety board to executive vice presidents and a representative from the office of the Chairman -- spent their morning and part of their afternoon in a wide ranging conversation about NetJets' approach to safe aircraft operations. In 2006, NetJets Inc. flew more than 370,000 flights covering 220,000,000 miles to more than 150 countries. NetJets flies more than 2,000 international trips per month to and from points all over the world.

After an overview presentation of the company (corporate structure and operations) by NetJets' president, there was a tour of the Columbus facility and the aircraft maintenance hangar. The facility includes a large customer service group, and centers for aircraft scheduling, weather information, and aircraft dispatch. The senior vice president for risk management discussed the company's emergency response plan developed to respond in the event of an accident involving a NetJets aircraft. NetJets also presented information on their approved charter vendor program, including the vigorous process by which they review and audit vendors to ensure safety and customer service.



Member Chealander Travels To Los Angeles

This past week, Member Chealander traveled to Los Angeles, where he visited with staff at the Southwest Regional office. While he was in the area, he also took a tour of the Los Angeles International Airport, where members of the Southwest Regional Office joined him. During the tour, airport officials showed the group plans for their new runway and the construction of the new taxiway. These safety improvements were designed to help reduce the chances of a runway incursion.

Bill Love Selected As Deputy General Counsel



The Office of General Counsel announced this week that Dr. Bill Love will become the Deputy General Counsel of the agency effective June 1. Bill has been a member of the Office of General Counsel since January 1998, and has been the Designated Agency Ethics Official (DAEO) since December 1999. He will continue to serve as the DAEO. Prior to joining the Safety Board, Bill had a distinguished career in the United States Air Force where he served first as a clinical psychologist (which is why he really is entitled to his nickname "Dr. Love") and as a Judge Advocate. Gary Halbert, General Counsel, in selecting Bill as Deputy, said, "I served as a JAG in the Air Force with Bill and have known him for well over 10 years. He is smart, hard working, mission oriented, and you can count on him to be a 'straight shooter' - giving you honest and wise counsel." Chairman Rosenker approved the selection, commenting, "We are fortunate to have Bill here at the NTSB - he won't let any of us cut corners in the ethics arena, and that is absolutely as it should be, because we are all public servants obligated to be good stewards of taxpayer moneys, to remain impartial and objective, while diligently pursuing our work. Bill exemplifies this philosophy, and I am delighted to have him as our Deputy GC." Please join us in congratulating Bill for this selection.

NTSB Administrative Council Holds Kick Off Meeting

The Office of Administration has established an Administrative Council for the agency; this Council serves as an opportunity for the administrative staff to identify and address pertinent issues, enhance communication and share information in the effort to continue to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the agency. The Council consist of AD, CFO, CIO, and a representative from each office. The Council meets quarterly to discuss issues pertinent in the areas of Administrative Services, Acquisition, Human Resources, Information Technology and Budget. Each member will have the opportunity to participate and express best practices on issues pertaining to the operating procedures of his/her organization. Although the Council is not a decision-making group nor will it make any policy changes, it is a partnership that will ensure that the agency becomes stronger, information flows faster and issues can be resolved more effectively.

NTSB Headquarters To Slim Down

The NTSB has initiated a plan to shed some excess square footage, as we currently have more office space than we need. More than 80 vacant office spaces, comprising approximately 13,000 square feet, are costing the Safety Board nearly half a million dollars per year in unused rental costs. With the anticipation of three more years under the current lease, that results in a significant cost to the Safety Board with little benefit to the agency. By consolidating office spaces, the NTSB can free up 9,500 square feet and recoup some of those funds through a sublease. The Office of Administration, with the assistance of the Office Heads and AFGE leadership, has prepared a space consolidation plan that will meet the basic needs of the agency. Office Heads, using established procedures with AFGE, are currently assigning individual employees to specific rooms in the new configuration and will be forwarding those lists to the Administrative Services Division (AD-10). Consolidation moves could begin as early as June - staff will be notified of the specific move schedule. According to the plan, all moves should be completed and the space prepared for sublease by the end of the fiscal year. The Office of Administration would like to thank the Staff for their patience and cooperation as we strive to be as efficient as possible for the taxpayers.

Chairman Rosenker Reminds Americans That Simple Safety Precautions Can Save Lives This Holiday Weekend

As Memorial Day heralds the dawn of another summer travel season, National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Mark V. Rosenker today reminded all Americans that a few simple safety precautions can save many lives both this weekend and all summer. He also gave his support to the nationwide "Click It Or Ticket" campaign, and praised New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine for his radio and television messages supporting seat belt use.

"Thousands of Americans die needlessly every year on our highways, hundreds more on our recreational waterways," Chairman Rosenker said. "A few simple safety precautions can reduce the chances of you becoming one of those statistics.

"Make sure that you don't drink and drive, or ride in a car with someone who is. Remember, the single most effective safety action you can take is to fasten your seatbelt. Unrestrained vehicle occupants are ejected 29 percent of the time, with 74 percent of those totally ejected killed.

"I applaud all the local and state authorities who are participating in the 'Click It Or Ticket' campaign around the country. And I particularly want to thank Governor Corzine for his powerful TV and radio message, which was released this week. He learned the importance of seat belt use from his near-death experience. Before putting your vehicle in Drive, make sure everyone in it is properly restrained."

An average of 714 boaters die each year on our waterways, 508 by drowning. Most of those who drown were in open motorboats and in boats less than 21 feet in length. According to U.S. Coast Guard statistics, about 84 percent of those drowning victims would still be alive if they had worn a Personal Flotation Device (PFD). The Safety Board has recommended that all states require PFD use by children under age 13.

"We all want to enjoy ourselves this summer with our friends and family," Rosenker said, "Let's be smart about safety."

A link to the Corzine PSA (both radio & TV) is on the NHTSA home page (<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/>) in the "What's New" section in the right hand column.