

NTSB Statement

I was the Captain of flight FDX1407, MEM-MSP, 24 Feb 15. The following is my recollection of events which occurred during our in-flight emergency.

I was the Pilot Flying (PF). At approximately 1205Z during cruise flight at FL360 the Fire Suppression System FSSDISCH Lights illuminated on the CAPT and FO glare shields. Seconds later one of the two jumpseaters (both FedEx Crewmembers) in the courier compartment notified us via intercom that the Fire Suppression System (FSS) Display by the L1 door indicated that the FSS had discharged into the container at position 1R. Position 1R contained the Accessible Dangerous Goods (ADG). He also told us that they could not see or smell any indications of fire or smoke. I assumed the worst case. KSTL was the closest suitable divert (approximately 80 NM south of our position). I had the First Officer (Pilot Monitoring) declare an emergency with ATC (Kansas City Center) as I began the turn back toward KSTL and we were immediately given direct KSTL with a descent to 16000'. I remained the PF, concentrating on getting the aircraft expeditiously, but safely on the deck. The First Officer coordinated with ATC, the jumpseaters, KSTL FedEx Operations, and GOC via ACARS. He reviewed the MD-11 Quick Reference Handbook (QRH) for any applicable checklists and we reviewed the Evacuation Checklist. We initially planned for RWY 30R (ATIS active runway), but were offered and accepted RWY 12L which was the closest runway. We accomplished all normal checklists and landed on RWY 12L with emergency responders standing by. We notified KSTL Tower of our intention to exit the runway and then evacuate the aircraft. We exited RWY 12L at TWY K, stopped heading 030 degrees at the intersection of TWYs K and F and initiated an evacuation IAW the QRH. I made the decision to evacuate through the L1 door in the following order: FO, jumpseaters, me. I was standing just outside the Flight Deck Door when the FO used the emergency handle to actuate the door. The door opened and I heard the slide inflating. After a quick exchange with what I assume were the emergency responders, I saw him jump on the slide like we are trained to do. I was at the back of the line and the next thing I hear from one of the jumpseaters is something to the effect of the FO is injured and he wasn't going to go down that slide. I looked out the door and saw the FO laying on the taxiway unattended to and in distress, not at the bottom of the slide, but approximately 20 feet left of the fuselage centerline and 20 feet forward of the L1 door. I don't know how he ended up at that location. The firemen were directing us to continue the evacuation on that slide; however, the slide did not look right. From my vantage point all I could say at that time is that it appeared inflated and the bottom was resting on the taxiway, but the gradient was very steep and the end of the slide appeared closer to the aircraft than it should be. I considered trying the R1 exit; however, the firemen wanted us to continue out L1. They had pulled the bottom of the slide away from the aircraft so that the gradient wasn't as steep, directed us to sit at the top of the slide and use the hand straps in the center of the slide about a foot below the level of the door to lower ourselves onto the slide, and then ride the slide down with them in a position to catch us. I elected to follow their guidance and was the next to evacuate. The jumpseaters followed me. While the jumpseaters were evacuating I checked on the FO who was still not being attended to. He told me that when his feet contacted the taxiway his face impacted his knees and he felt like his back was injured. I would say that it took the EMTs approximately 10-15 minutes to arrive and attend to his injuries. One other point, until the EMTs showed up, the jumpseaters did their best to care for the FO including trying to keep him warm. He was lying on the taxiway in his uniform leather jacket in freezing temperatures and physically started shivering before a blanket was eventually provided to cover him with. After the evacuation of the aircraft all I can say is that I think things should have been handled better by the Fire Department. I briefed the Fire Chief that we had indications of deployment of the FSS into the ADG container with no other fire or smoke indications and gave him our copy of the DG Summary (the ULD DG Manifest was still on the flight deck). I assumed their first priority would be to board the aircraft and determine the status the container. Instead, I was asked if FedEx maintenance personnel or myself were going to ride the brakes on the flight deck while maintenance towed the aircraft to the FedEx ramp and the taxiway could be re-opened. I politely told him that wasn't going to

happen until the status of the ADG container at 1R was determined. I also gathered from our conversation that they were unfamiliar with the location of 1R and how to access the main cargo deck. Soon after the evacuation and my initial conversations with the FO and the Fire Chief, the jumpseaters asked me to look at the L1 slide. The top side of the slide looked somewhat normal; however, all of the vertical and horizontal support chambers on the bottom side of the slide were either not inflated or partially inflated at best. When the Fire Department procured some stairs, I led them on board through the L1 door, opened the main cargo deck access door, and pointed them to the ADG container. They opened the ADG container and determined that the FSS had discharged into the container; however, they saw no residual fire or smoke indications. I grabbed the ULD DG Manifest on the flight deck and gave it to the Fire Chief which he returned to me later. The Fire Chief released the aircraft to FedEx maintenance who detached the slide and towed the aircraft to the FedEx ramp. Throughout the event I had multiple phone conversations with the FedEx Duty Officer to keep him in the loop and to determine the status of the FO who had been transported to the hospital. After arriving at the FedEx Ramp Office I was given the Aircraft Maintenance Log and made two entries: The failure of the L1 door slide to properly deploy; and the in-flight deployment of the FSS. The jumpseaters were there and were preparing to get transported to the passenger terminal to catch a jumpseat to KMSP. I thanked them for their assistance and they provided me with photos they had taken of the L1 slide soon after the evacuation. I also had more phone conversations with the Duty Officer and also with Captain Tim Murphy from the FedEx Flight Safety Office. His immediate concern was the deployment of the L1 slide due to the FO's injuries. I told him I had photos and he asked me to send them to him when able. Three FAA representatives (I don't remember any names) soon arrived and asked some questions about the incident. When they learned that the FSS had discharged into the ADG container they told the FedEx Ramp Manager to quarantine the aircraft until an FAA Haz Mat specialist arrived and had a look. She eventually arrived, inspected the ADG container, and then all FAA personnel soon departed. I then texted photos of the slide to Captain Murphy. After receiving them he asked me if I had any photos of the FSS/ADG container. I went back on board the aircraft with FedEx ramp personnel, took some photos with my phone, and emailed them to him. I'm not an expert on the Fire Suppression System but I don't think it operated like it is supposed to. It appeared to me that in the process of the FSS piercing the roof of the container it dented it so much that only about an inch at best penetrated the inside of the container. The DG boxes were stacked on either side of the container and I saw no evidence of any of the retardant on the boxes. I saw liquid on the center floor of the container, and liquid on the main cargo deck floor immediately in front of the ADG container door.

Respectfully,

Keith W. Beam, 276548
MD-11 Captain