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April 23, 2013

Kristi Dunks
Senior Air Safety Investigator
National Transportation Safety Board
Western Pacific Region

RE: WPR12LA053
Southwest Airlines Flight 1489
December 1, 2011
N261WN B737-7H4
KABQ - KOAK

Ms. Dunks,

Per your request, please find below the statements from the Pilots, Flight Attendants, and Dispatcher of Southwest Airlines Flight 1489 on December 1, 2011.

Thank you,

Dennis Post
Safety Investigator
Southwest Airlines, Co.

Captain's Statement:

We had just descended from FL400 to FL300 due to moderate turbulence at the higher altitude. ATC had recommended the lower altitude and we could stop at any smooth altitude. We had continuous turbulence through FL320. The ride was significantly better at FL300. Shortly thereafter we encountered abrupt and significant severe turbulence. Aircraft instantly accelerated from .760 mach to .865 with significant vertical pitch change and some associated yaw. The instrumentation was mostly unreadable and the clacker sounded. I could only see that the aircraft was exceeding MMO and deployed the speed brake in an attempt to control the acceleration. The turbulence incident lasted approximately 10 seconds. ATC was immediately advised of the turbulence and we requested an immediate descent. We then checked on the status of the crew and passengers and were advised that the flight attendants were injured and required medical attention. There were no reports of passenger injuries. We declared a medical emergency and were cleared direct to OAK. There were several dead-heading crew members onboard that assisted the injured flight attendants. We requested medical assistance through ATC, ACARS and OAK Operations.

Uneventful approach and landing followed by medical personnel meeting us at the gate. Upon landing medical personnel met us at the gate and it was determined that the B and C flight attendants that had been injured in the aft galley needed transport to the hospital for further evaluation. The A flight attendant complained of sore shoulder and was not taken to the hospital. No passengers appeared to be injured. The Passengers were advised multiple times to report any injuries before leaving the gate area. Customer service personnel were working closely with the passengers. SWA personnel accompanied the crew members to the hospital.

First Officer's Statement:

Departing ABQ we knew we would have rough rides, so we asked the Flight Attendants to remain seated until called. Approx 45 minutes after departure, the ride was smooth enough to let them up, so the Captain cleared them up. The rides deteriorated again and the Captain sat them down and the passenger seatbelt sign was illuminated. The rides were intermittently bumpy for a while. Down the road, we started to get intermittent moderate turbulence at FL400 and asked ATC for advice on a better altitude. They said lower was better and we were cleared to FL300 and could stop anywhere in between if we found a good ride. Through FL320 the ride was continuous light turbulence, but below was smooth so we stopped at FL300. We reported the smooth ride to ATC at FL300 and continued cruise at 0.76 Mach. Approximately 5 minutes after level off we encountered severe turbulence. The ride went from smooth to severe turbulence instantly, with no deterioration leading up to it. The aircraft immediately exceeded MMO and was shaking so badly I couldn't read the instruments and couldn't grab the yoke, but I could see we were about 2.5 inches into the red band on the airspeed indicator, so I knew we had exceeded limits. This lasted about 5 seconds, then stopped. The seatbelt sign was still on, so the passengers were seated, but all 3 Flight Attendants were up during the event. I don't recall the Captain clearing them to get back up after they had been seated earlier, and he could not recall doing it either when we discussed it post-incident. After we regained control of the aircraft, we advised ATC of the severe turbulence and requested an immediate descent, which was granted. As the Captain flew the airplane, I contacted the Flight Attendants and the B Flight Attendants answered in the back galley. He was in obvious pain and had trouble communicating information clearly, but it was obvious that he and the C Flight Attendant were badly injured and I understood that they couldn't get up because of their injuries, which possibly included back and knee injuries. The A Flight Attendant in the front galley reported that she had been injured too, but I also had a hard time getting clear information from her, so I could not understand the extent of her injuries. I asked about the passengers and it sounded like they were OK, although it was difficult to get clear information at this stage. We declared a medical emergency with ATC and got clearance direct OAK, where we landed approx 25 minutes later. The Captain and I discussed QRH and determined that the aircraft was OK and there were no appropriate sections to run--it was best to just land quickly. We advised dispatch and maintenance of the event via ACARS and requested medical assistance at the gate through ACARS, ATC and OAK operations. ATC called us during descent to apologize for the turbulence, saying they did not know about it and there had been no previous aircraft reports of severe turbulence in that area. I advised

them it was not their fault--just bad luck. During descent I called back to the Flight Attendants several times to clarify details and it became apparent that the B and C Flight Attendants were immobile, but the A Flight Attendant was still ambulatory and not hurt as badly. Also it appeared that the passengers had all been sitting as directed and none had been up during the turbulence event. There were no known passenger injuries. During descent we advised all passengers to remain seated and advised them to notify us of any injuries. On the ground and at the gate, we advised the passengers two more times before deplaning to notify us of any injuries before they left the gate area.

A Position Flight Attendant's Statement:

Upon boarding in ABQ, the winds were so bad they could not use the trucks to provision the plane. I asked the first officer if we were within the wind limits for the jetway and he said they must be because they were boarding. The passengers were vocalizing their concern about how bad the wind was and how bumpy the flight would be. So after my opening PA, I made an additional PA, reminding everyone about the wind in ABQ and in California due to the Santa Anna winds and to not take the seatbelt sign lightly. I told them it would be bumpy and to please keep their seatbelts securely fastened. Just after the top of descent, I had cleaned up most of my front galley and was squatting to close my kits when we hit unusually bad turbulence. I grabbed the counter with my left hand. I was tossed repeatedly up and down, then violently to the left, then to the right and left again. Then the plane went down to the point where my feet were off the ground for a couple seconds, then I was slammed to the ground, landing on my rear end with legs out to sides. It then lessened enough for me to crawl to my jump seat. The captain immediately called back to ask if we were alright. The B and I were on the phone and he said they were hurt, the C really bad. The Captain then did a PA to the Cabin telling everyone to remain seated with seat belts fastened and to let them know after landing if they needed medical attention because he was having EMT's meet the plane. I assessed myself then went to the back of the plane. No one asked for attention on my way back, and no call lights were on. The B and C were buckled in the jump seat. The B then got up and said they had both hit the ceiling a couple times and the C came down on her back and couldn't feel her legs. I asked him if he would be able to do the doors and he said yes. We then quickly started to secure the galley. There was liquid everywhere even all over the ceiling. The B and C were all wet. The C had even lost a shoe. The trash can was sideways on the floor. No soda cans were left in galley 4 and most were out of galley 3. The soda cans were all over the floor and in the aisle. I had seated passengers toss the cans to me from the aisle. I opened the door to the lav to toss the cans in, and all stored supplies were on the floor. I tossed in cans and closed the door. I had seated passengers hand me the cans that were in the aisle and threw them in the wheelchair compartment. Once the galley was secure, I asked the B again if he was okay to do the doors. I told him to secure himself, we could have more turbulence. I then went through the cabin looking for the flight attendant that identified herself to me, I couldn't see her so I called out "Where's my Flight Attendant?" She said "right here". I asked her if she would land up front with me and she said yes. I made a PA saying "Flight Attendants take your seats." and instructed passengers to "remain seated and to put all trash in the seat back pockets". The Captain told everyone to remain

seated with seat belts fastened until medics could get to the back of the plane. Supervisors and Medics met the plane along with additional Flight Attendants. The medics carried the C off the plane. Passengers were visibly shaken and some shared their concern for me because they said they saw me hit the floor. I was sore, but felt I could perform my duties so I did not go to the hospital.

B Position Flight Attendant's Statement:

On flight 1489 from ABQ to OAK, I and the C flight attendant were seriously injured during Code 6 turbulence. Shortly before being injured, one of the pilots informed us that they were going to have the flight attendants secure the cabin 35 minutes early due to projected turbulence near OAK. The C and I were standing in the Aft Galley when unexpected, and, according to the pilots, unseen Code 6 turbulence struck. She and I were thrown in the air, our heads hitting the ceiling. Upon hitting the floor, the aircraft started tossing us violently side to side. There were dozens of cans on the floor, footing was difficult before that. I injured my lower back upon being thrown to the ground. I was able to grab the flight attendant jumpseat, pull it down, and although I couldn't fully brace myself, or get up, I was able to put my arm on the C and reduce the distance she was sliding on the galley floor. We were both able to reach the jumpseat (I helped her), we put our seatbelts on, and remain seated during landing. We were both seriously injured. Our A flight attendant, and another flight attendant traveling as a passenger, arrived in the back. They helped throw cans of soda in the Aft Lav, as well as clean up items on the Aft Galley floor. The pilots called, asking about our injuries. I gave them a report, and stated that the C and I would need to be pulled in Oakland. There were no passenger injuries, according to our knowledge. The seat belt had been on. The C was in so much pain, that it hurt for her to breathe. It hurt to breathe for me as well. She asked me what a concussion felt like. She stated after she hit her head that she had temporarily gone unconscious. For landing, the C and I were on the Aft jumpseat, and, previous to this, I had informed the A, that if we were to have an evacuation, I could open the Aft Service Door. Upon arrival at the gate, paramedics met the aircraft. Passengers were informed to remain seated until the C could be removed from the aircraft, via the onboard wheelchair. I walked off the aircraft without assistance. The C was put on a stretcher. We were escorted to the Alameda Hospital Emergency Room. The C's neck was put in a splint; they checked our vital signs; she was given a shot of morphine by an EMT for pain on the way to the hospital. During the incident, I bit the front part of my tongue (resulting in bleeding), and received a cut to my right wrist (which also bled). By the time we arrived at the hospital, my back had tightened to the point where I was escorted inside in a wheelchair. At the hospital, the C and I were met by a nurse, and had X-rays performed. The initial reading of my back X-ray was that there wasn't any major damage. I was given prescriptions (for pain and to relax the back muscles). Based upon our X-ray results, the C and I were released from the hospital, and spent the night at a hotel in Oakland. Friday afternoon, I received the results of the radiologist's reading of my back X-ray. The result was a "compression fracture" in my lower back. I spoke with an Inflight Supervisor Friday afternoon and started an OJI claim. I flew back to Las Vegas from Oakland Friday night, and went to a Las Vegas Concentra Care facility. The Doctor met with me and after reviewing the X-ray copy I brought from the Alameda Hospital, he stated I had a

"compression fracture" in my second and third Lumbar Vertebrae. A referral to a back specialist was made.

C Position Flight Attendant's Statement:

I was the C flight attendant. We had all finished our beverage service, snacks and trash. When we landed in ABQ the winds were over 60 mph, therefore the provisioners were unable to bring the trucks to the plane and provision us. During the initial descent, the pilots called us and asked us to clean up early because they were expecting turbulence later in the decent. The B FA offered to go do trash while I stayed in the back to clean up/ prepare for arrival. When the B came back with the trash, I only had a few more cans to dump and then put in the recycle bin when severe turbulence hit. We were lifted off our feet, hitting both of our heads on the ceiling of the plane. We then crashed down to the galley floor, where I again hit my head. There was much up and down turbulence and then rapid side to side turbulence which caused me to be flung into the captain's side aft door. For about 30 seconds, I was unaware of which way was right side up or down. I was unable to discern up from down. The B had rolled over toward me where he tried to grab onto me and help me protect my head, but through all those bumps, we were not able to grab hold of anything to brace ourselves. The aft back-stock door was open because we had not been provisioned in ABQ. There were full cans flying and exploding, as well as the trash can being toppled over. When the turbulence stopped, the B was able to pull the jump seat down, but I was somewhere against the aft entry door and somewhat underneath the jump seat. He pulled me up and I fastened myself in. I realized then that I was in severe pain in my lower back and had left knee. The pilots called us immediately after the turbulence and the B answered telling them that we were both hurt and asking me if I was bleeding and where I hurt. I was unable to straighten my back and stayed hunched over with my arms out bracing the wheelchair stowage in order to not be jostled by any further turbulence. The B had bitten his tongue which was bleeding and had somehow gotten onto his pants. I had no bleeding. We both complained of back pain and head pain. The A FA came back a few minutes later with another commuting FA and helped clean up all of the fallen cans, some of which were shoved into the LAV or the wheelchair stowage. My left foot was missing its shoe which we were unable to locate before landing. The paramedics came on board and started to take my blood pressure, then ended up just putting me on a wheelchair and into a neck brace. When we got into the jet bridge they transferred me into a gurney and rolled me into the airport. I was still hunched over and unable to straighten by back due to the lower back pain.

Dispatcher's Statement:

I received an ACARS message at 2156 CST that the flight had encountered severe turbulence resulting in all three flight attendants sustaining injuries as well as aircraft experiencing an overspeed. Turbulence Plot (TP) SW45 was valid calling for Code 4 turbulence from FL300-FL420 in this vicinity. SWA1489 had been planned and filed with ATC to descend to FL260 prior to entering this TP area. Flight landing at 2226CST

and aircraft was met by EMT, with all Flight Attendants removed from duty and placed in the care of EMTs.