

**Docket No. SA-540**

**Exhibit No. 14 J**

**NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD**

**Washington, D.C.**

FAA CFIT Letter

(4 Pages)

## Attachment 9

to the Human Performance Specialist's Factual Report

ANC17MA001

FAA CFIT Letter



U.S. Department  
of Transportation  
**Federal Aviation  
Administration**

Office of the Flight Standards Division  
Alaska Region

222 West 7<sup>th</sup> Ave, Suite #14  
Anchorage, AK 99513-7587  
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May 11, 2016

Dear Owner/Operator,

I am writing you today to enlist your help in solving a significant safety issue that impacts the aviation community and the traveling public in Alaska.

In the last twelve months, there has been a significant increase in Controlled Flight Into Terrain (CFIT) events associated with Part 135 operations. This has resulted in 24 fatalities or serious injuries to passengers and pilots of Part 135 operations in Alaska. Many of these CFIT accidents have occurred in aircraft with advanced avionics, which were capable of instrument flight and operated by experienced pilots.

You have received this letter because as an owner or Part 119 official of a Part 135 carrier, you are responsible for and have the authority to drive the safety culture in your carrier. Safety starts at the top with you, and your efforts must drive safety to permeate your entire operation, from the highest level to the lowest level within your carrier. As a certificated entity, your company has a statutory obligation to operate to the highest level of safety in the public's interest. The regulations have been written broadly enough to allow carriers to develop guidance and procedures to ensure compliance with the statutory requirements. When a carrier becomes aware of or identifies hazards, they must take immediate steps to mitigate the associated risks to continue operating safely in the National Airspace System. A CFIT event is one of those hazards, which you must act to prevent by ensuring effective safety controls are in place to prevent these deadly accidents.

Working with Alaskan carriers and the Medallion Foundation, we have identified several recommendations that can reduce your CFIT potential. I am asking you to seriously consider the following questions, how they apply to your operations today, and if changes in these areas would enable or enhance safety controls in your system.

- Are you an IFR capable operator who routinely operates VFR based on pilot preference?
  - Whenever possible, operate in the IFR environment to provide a higher level of safety. Obviously, for some this may be impractical based on current equipment or type of operations requiring VFR, such as Air Tours or fly out fishing and/or hunting trips.
- How do you conduct Special VFR operations? Do you have good policies and procedures to ensure a safe outcome?
  - You may have a mile visibility in the surface area but you should also have a reasonable expectation the weather will improve so the pilot can comply with Part



135.203 & .205. Special VFR cannot be used to bridge surface areas without required weather minimums between them.

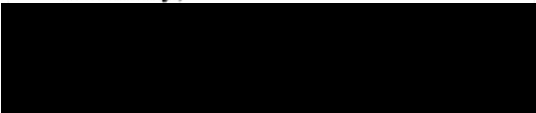
- Have you identified VFR routes that you expect your pilots to fly? Are these routes documented in your manual system, including day and night VFR weather minimums that comply with Part 135.203 and .205? Are these routes programmed in the databases of your navigational equipment?
  - Creation and use of these routes will go a long way to help pilots maintain situational awareness. They ensure that pilots know that they are clearly expected to operate at a higher level of safety and provide a needed aid if things begin to deteriorate.
- Are your training programs thorough and effective, covering scenarios that your pilots are likely to encounter? Do they address the following:
  - Does your training program contain escape maneuvering for inadvertent IMC?
    - VFR into IMC is the leading cause of CFIT accidents in Alaska; scenario based training and planned escape routes will reinforce positive pilot behaviors.
  - Are you using a cue-based approach to teach pilots inflight visibility determination?
    - Incorporating landmarks along the route of flights to define go/no-go points will aid pilots in making good decisions to proceed or return.
  - Do your training programs address Whiteout and Flat Light conditions?
    - These common phenomena routinely lead to misjudgments by pilots resulting in CFIT accidents; pilots who are trained to recognize and overcome these situations can avoid costly mistakes.
  - Does your avionics training ensure pilots can utilize the navigation equipment effectively while safely operating the aircraft?
    - Proper training of equipment capabilities and use, combined with defined routing programmed into avionics, will provide pilots with easy safe options to address unforeseen circumstances.
- Do you require the completion of Flight Risk Assessments prior to all departures?
  - The Flight Risk Assessments has proven to be a very effective tool for pilot decision-making but it must require management involvement as the risk increases. Your involvement ensures the pilot is not relied on as the sole point of failure in the system.
- Is your Flight Locating System appropriate for the size and scope of your operation?
  - Do pilots have the latest weather, NOTAMS, and other information needed to conduct the flight safely?
  - Is maintenance integrated into the flight release process?
  - Are you tracking flights real time?
    - Flight Locating Systems that incorporate these elements ensure that pilots are not the sole point of failure by bringing maintenance, dispatch elements, and managers into the decision process.

- Finally, is the culture of your company one that supports the taking of inappropriate risks or is it one that makes it every employee's responsibility to ensure safety is at the heart of every operation?
  - Most CFIT accidents are because of inappropriate or non-existent safety cultures, leaving all decisions up to and placing all responsibilities on a pilot who may have to make split second, life or death decisions. A positive safety cultures breeds safe and effective decisions by ensuring effective safety controls exist at all levels.

In the coming weeks and months our Aviation Safety Inspectors, FAAS Team, and FAA managers will be engaging industry to help create awareness of and put an end to CFIT accidents in Alaska. In addition to these FAA resources, the Medallion Foundation is available and can help guide you in developing systems, policies, and procedures to prevent CFIT accidents.

I know that by working together we can eliminate the CFIT Hazard in Alaska.

Sincerely,



Clint Wease  
Division Manager  
Alaskan Region Flight Standards