

Training Topic:**Emergency Response- A Discourse on Action****Your company's aircraft is down.**

What happens on the first day amounts to people and agencies executing planned responses to an aviation accident. The company has two duties to attend to immediately. One is to notify the appropriate personnel and regulatory agencies, usually by telephone. The other is to properly inform the next-of-kin of those injured, missing or dead.

**Who's in Charge?**

Hopefully your company's personnel are trained to act in the event of an accident until a member of the Emergency Response Team arrives. Someone needs to be in charge; available employees should grab the bull by the horns and start to control the situation until the Senior Contact or Response Team Director is present. Some evidence is perishable and best gathered fresh. Do not wait for someone whose arrival may be undetermined.

First things first. You will not solve the mystery on day one. The day's activity will be spent doing what needs doing: taking care of the living, managing information, contacting the right people and places.

Resist the temptation to rush to the mishap scene. Although the company will be itching with curiosity, its first response is not to scramble to the site. Crash/fire/rescue, medical and security personnel constitute the first wave to a crash site. The site will be

in good hands until you arrive a little later and better organized.

Assemble and Organize the Emergency Response Team/Center

Gather to count noses and pool information. Assess your situation, then move with direction and purpose.

Take notes. This parenthetical consideration does not fit neatly into an outline, but applies throughout an investigation. The information each team member acquires, the observations each makes will quickly exceed short-term memory and be lost. To prevent wasting time in recapturing the same information, everyone needs to take notes. A pocket-sized notebook and pen can be a responder's most valuable tools.

Counting noses. You need operations, maintenance, and safety members at a minimum; one should be a pilot qualified in the aircraft model involved in the accident. If any member is not available or disqualified by context from the investigation at hand, the senior contact/emergency response director must weigh how tasks can be redistributed (short-term) and where to seek replacement. Canvas team members for the following:

- Availability through the investigation's expected duration
- Direct involvement in the mishap
- A personal interest in the mishap which might impede objectivity or impartiality while performing emergency response duties.



Pooling information. Here begins the rigor of evaluating information: is it authoritative, first-hand, without speculation? It will be incomplete, count on it. Notice or rumor of an accident can come from any quarter: ATC, internal company communication, police, news media, or a bystander. Obtain as much detail as your informant has: location, time, damage/injury, survivors, agencies responding or on-scene.

Maintain an intellectual detachment: some of what passes for "known" shortly after a mishap turns out to be inaccurate, even wildly so. This comes from embellishment or interpretation as people relaying a report fill in blanks or offer what it means to them, rather than passing it as they received it.

Grasp the following if information permits: accident context (flight, equipment, cargo, route, location, weather); damage to aircraft and surroundings; survivors and casualties (crew, passengers, personnel on the ground). You will notice the elements of information form only a distant view of what happened, where and to whom as opposed to why, how and by whom. The latter describe cause, are harder to resolve and require more information before you can form authoritative conclusions. You're not there yet. Other matters are pressing, so don't linger over missing details.

Take the reins, and go to work.

Designate a space where you can conduct your business. You need exclusive-use space, secure file storage (or keys to the room), telephone, work table, blackboard (or equivalent), and access to a copier. A computer is helpful, as is a clerk typist who tells no tales. If you lack any of the preceding, exercise your horsepower to get as many as you can.

Initiate your family assistance and grief counseling program to help survivors and families of victims deal with the impact of the accident. Services provided should include family/victim support coordination. Agencies such as the American Red Cross have programs to provide for the emotional well-being of the families of survivors and those whose lives are lost in an aviation disaster. Your company may have a relationship or contract with a grief counseling service; now is the time to engage their expertise.

Allow enough time to allow team members to do their independent work, eat and rest. Take a long view: you may be in this for more than a few days. Begin to pace yourself and the Response Team.

Briefly consider the prior division of duties among team members. Lists in your ERP should divide response/investigation activity; this coordinates action to cover a lot of territory in quick time. Accident circumstances may necessitate a change in items' priorities or may eliminate some altogether. Some actions are deferrable: they will keep until you get to them a day or two later.

Retrieve documentary and real evidence (records, preflight fluid samples). While it is important to isolate these as a snapshot of conditions preceding or at the accident, the information they contain is not perishable. Gather them for safekeeping until time permits review or analysis. Records or samples can probably be gathered in an hour by one person.

Look over the first-day checklists or have each team member state their intentions. Affirm or succinctly alter near-term (today's) tasks. If you add or redirect a task, name who responsible for completion and its precedence among his other tasks.

**Are you going to the site?**

Arrange transportation to the site. Make sure you use an adequately prepared Go-Kit containing everything you will need, especially if the site is located in a remote area. Expect the Go-Kit to be short some gear; not all wrinkles will have been foreseen. Knowing where to get something quickly is good enough. You may have to visit a

sporting goods store or hardware store en route for items not in the kit. Do not count on hot-and-cold running transportation unless the keys are yours. Corollary to Murphy's Law: the more inaccessible the site---the higher the likelihood of being stranded. Think about precipitation (clothing) and where you will be staying (water and food). Like the Boy Scouts, Be Prepared.

Crash Site

Exercise caution and restraint. The site and wreckage will have hazards unfamiliar to visitors, and visitors are inherently a hazard to evidence. No one from the response team or company should be on the wreckage site unless approved by authorities.

Consider your first visit a reconnaissance. Withhold hasty judgments: understanding will take time and complimentary evidence not at the crash site. Resist the delusion of solving the mystery before sundown: you are likely to jump to a wrong conclusion. Patience. See the forest before barking up trees.

Walk wide around wreckage and ground scars to see the site from every angle. Look for indications of flight direction and descent angle, then imagine the cockpit view.

Take in the BIG picture, and have a photographer do likewise. Satisfy yourself the aircraft is present or accounted for: missing parts may be cause to expand the search back along the flight path. If the four corners (nose, tail, wingtips) are on site, the structure between them is too; still, bits (aileron, stores, turbine wheel, etc.) **may** can have departed before impact. Helos have more than four corners, so the process is more difficult: blades (extremities to count) usually fragment on contacting ground and can hurl hundreds of feet from the airframe.

Keep your hands in your pockets. Do not charge into the wreckage to open panels, flip controls or try switches. Disorganized, undisciplined handling of the wreckage disturbs evidence and leaves no record of condition as-found. Your initial focus is the large view, a reconnaissance.

Wrap it up

Response Team members may have gone about tasks separately, but their product is necessary for common information. Have each member present his progress and findings since last assembled, to bring everyone abreast of developments and to build the grasp of available evidence. Confine discussion on the mishap to observations and facts.

Coordinate with the NTSB to ensure all required information has been provided or is being assembled for submission to the appropriate investigators. Have the team create a synopsis of the emergency response, and meticulously gather all of the team's work product in a well organized package. Keep this information and work product secure and well organized. Don't throw anything out; you never know what may prove invaluable during the accident investigation.