

Comprehensive Alaska Aviation Safety Approach Needed

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WASHINGTON (Feb. 20, 2020) — The National Transportation Safety Board called Thursday for a comprehensive effort to improve aviation safety in Alaska, a region with a higher accident rate than the rest of the country.

The NTSB issued a safety recommendation to the Federal Aviation Administration seeking the formation of a safety-focused working group to better review, prioritize and integrate Alaska's unique aviation safety needs into the FAA's safety enhancement process.

"We need to marshal the resources of the FAA to tackle aviation safety in Alaska in a comprehensive way," said NTSB Chairman Robert L. Sumwalt. "The status quo is, frankly, unacceptable."

From 2008 to 2017 the total accident rate in Alaska was 2.35 times higher than for the rest of the United States. The fatal accident rate in the state was 1.34 times higher, according to NTSB statistics.

Sumwalt said while the FAA has a multitude of initiatives at different stages of implementation, the "silo-like" nature of the FAA's sprawling organization makes it difficult to develop a comprehensive plan for a state like Alaska, with its distinct set of challenges.

The safety recommendation stems in part from an NTSB roundtable discussion last September in Anchorage, where Alaska aviation stakeholders discussed how aviation safety can be improved. Although the roundtable focused on Part 135 operations — which include business and charter flights — some of the proposals discussed, such as improving pilot training and consistently managing weather risks, are applicable to all aviation operations in Alaska.

"Whether it is a Part 135 flight or a pleasure trip, all pilots must deal with Alaska's challenging geography and weather," Sumwalt said. "We need to give them all the tools and resources to do so safely."

Improve the Safety of Part 135 Aircraft Flight Operations is on the NTSB's 2019–2020 Most Wanted List of transportation safety improvements.

Associated report: Safety Recommendation Report ASR-20-02, *Revise Processes to Implement Safety Enhancements for Alaska Aviation Operations* (report date February 13, 2020), containing Safety Recommendation A-20-11.

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