

## A practical guide: How to deal with an aircraft accident

This information has been prepared by the Bureau of Air Accident Investigation to provide guidance to the general public and other stakeholders in relation to aircraft accidents. It provides information on the actions to be taken should a person witness, or be required to attend or assist in an aircraft accident.

### What is an Accident?

Briefly, an accident is an occurrence involving the operation of an aircraft from the time of boarding to the time the engines stop and all persons have left the aircraft. It is an occurrence in which a person is fatally or seriously injured, or in which the aircraft sustains substantial damage, or where the aircraft is missing or inaccessible. BAAI does its investigations independently from the police, Judiciary and other safety authorities.



**ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION**

## INCIDENT vs. ACCIDENT

An incident is an unexpected event that may result in property damage, but **does not result in an injury or illness**. Incidents are also called, "near misses," or "near hits."

An accident is an unexpected event that may result in property damage, and **does result in an injury or illness** to an employee.

What is the difference between an incident and an accident?

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### Who is responsible to report an accident or serious incident?

The responsibility to notify BAAI/Authorities of an accident rests principally with the pilot-in-command (PIC), his/her agent or operator and this should be done as soon as is practicable after the accident. In some circumstances, however, an operator may not become aware that their aircraft has been involved in an accident until quite some time after the event. Therefore, any person becoming aware of an accident is encouraged to notify the BAAI or the police without delay.

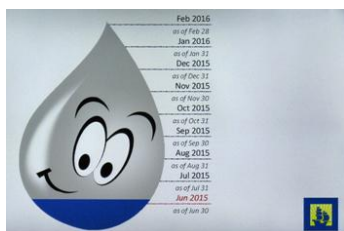
In order to avoid confusion or misunderstanding the information provided should be concise but as accurate as possible.

### Nonprofessional Report (Witness)

- Time of the accident or serious incident
- Location
- Type of aircraft (if known) and colour. If the type is not known, describe the aircraft as accurately as possible.
- Any fatalities and/or survivors.
- Report a fire even if it is a small one or some distance from the aircraft wreck



## Information to be Notified by the Operator.



The notification of any aircraft accident should contain as much of the following information as possible. Do not delay notification for any reason; even if not all the required information is available.

- Date, time of the accident.
  - Nature of the accident.
  - Aircraft type and registration.
  - Name of the operator or owner.
- Exact location of the accident.
  - Name of the pilot in command.
  - The type of operation (air transport, training, private, etc.).
  - Aircraft's last departure point and its destination.
  - Description of weather conditions.
  - Total number of persons on board.
  - Number of crew and/or passengers killed or seriously injured as a consequence of the accident.
  - Number of persons killed or seriously injured as a result of the accident that were not crew or passengers.
  - Details of the damage to the aircraft.
  - Name of the person reporting the accident, and the best telephone number for contacting them in the days immediately following the notification.

*Note; For reporting safety concerns or requesting safety advice, telephone the CAD on Tel: +356 2555 565 or the Police or the BAAI Chief Investigator +356 99382725. Once BAAI has been advised of the accident the Chief Investigator will then decide if it is appropriate to initiate an investigation.*

## BAAI Safety Investigation.

BAAI safety investigators review accidents for the sole purpose of improving aviation safety. The Safety Investigation Unit does not undertake an investigation in order to apportion blame or liability.

The information gained from a safety investigation may result in safety recommendations, rule changes, Airworthiness Directives, changes to a company's operating procedures, or perhaps recommendations of an educational nature.

BAAI is required by law to investigate aviation accidents/ serious incidents and the extent of an investigation may vary considerably depending on the severity of the accident/serious incident. The investigation may be conducted by one or more of BAAI's own investigators or with the assistance from foreign SIAs, especially if the accident is deemed to be complicated or big accident. In addition, an investigation may be conducted as a field investigation and will take as long as necessary to gather an adequate amount of information or as an office-based investigation if it is felt that field inquiries will not provide any additional information.

BAAI directs its resources towards the in-depth investigation of those accidents most likely to yield maximum public safety benefit or enhance aviation safety. This gives BAAI some discretion in deciding which accidents it investigates. In practice, this means that BAAI will normally investigate those accidents that are not considered to be an ICAO Annex two aircrafts.



## Custody and Protection of Aircraft Wreckage



It is imperative that the aircraft wreckage, and any marks made by it at the scene of the accident, are not disturbed unnecessarily. However, this should not in any way prevent or hold back any of the following:

- The extraction of survivors, including live animals from the wreckage.
  - The protection of the wreckage and its contents, including mail and/or cargo, from damage by fire as a result of the accident.
- The removal or retrieval of the aircraft, including its contents to a safe place when the aircraft is in or near water
  - Depending on the severity of the accident, the removal of the wreckage to prevent obstruction to public access or to other aircraft using the area.
  - Unless it is necessary to gain access to victims (including live animals) or baggage/cargo, it is suggested that such items will be removed in the presence of a police officer unless it is known to contain explosives, radio-active or infectious material.

In almost all accidents, no further unsupervised disturbance of the wreckage should be necessary after the occupants have been extracted.

The provisions of the Civil Aviation act SL 499.22 and EU Reg. 996/2010 mean that any aircraft involved in an accident effectively comes under the jurisdiction of the investigating authority BAAI. This implies that even the pilot or owner does not have the right to access the aircraft without being authorised by the investigator in charge. It is accepted, however, that when an aircraft owner's property is likely to receive further damage following an accident, they, or their representative, may be granted access, provided they are under the supervision of a police officer and the BAAI investigator.

*Note; Even if no field investigation is to be carried out, a clearance is still required from the BAAI for the wreckage to be moved off the site.*

## Supporting and assisting the Investigation



Normally, police, fire, civil protection or ambulance personnel will be at the scene of an aircraft accident soon after it occurs. For various reasons, the accident investigators may not reach the scene of the accident immediately or it may take some time to reach the site. There are a number of ways the investigation can be assisted during this waiting period.

- If it is absolutely necessary to disturb the wreckage, an effort should be made to photograph, sketch, or otherwise note the state of the wreckage.

*Note; after disturbance, no attempt should be made to restore the wreckage to its original state, except as requested by the investigator.*

- As soon a practical make a record of the positions of the aircraft wreckage from which occupants were assisted or extracted.
- A photographic and sketch record should be made of any marks on the ground or on the wreckage that might be wiped out or altered before the arrival of the investigator on site.

- The wreckage, and any of the aircraft's contents or papers, should be secured against loss, destruction or further damage by fire.

*Note; the PIC, Owner or Operator of the aircraft should not be allowed to handle all or any of the aircraft documents without the specific permission of the investigator in charge.*

- The position of any scattered wreckage located away from the main accident site should be noted, and measures taken to ensure that it is not disturbed.
- The names, addresses, telephone numbers, and intended movements of any witnesses should be noted. This same action should be taken in respect of any people who have taken photographs or video of the wreckage, or who have other evidence that might be relevant.

When on-site investigative activity is complete, the investigator in charge may hand over the wreckage to the owner.

The recovery or salvage and cleanup of an accident site (including the associated costs) are the responsibility of the aircraft owner or operator.

There will be occasions when the investigating authority requires some or all of the wreckage for off-site examination. On those occasions the investigator will work with the owner to arrange for recovery. The investigating authority will normally only cover costs that are directly associated with investigation activities.

## Hazardous Materials

There can sometimes be a variety of hazardous substances present in an aircraft accident scene. These may include:

- Toxic chemicals that could be inhaled, or affect the skin.
- Airborne synthetic products similar in nature to asbestos fibers or other substances.
- Potentially explosive devices such as oxygen bottles, high-pressure Tyer-tubes, hydraulic accumulators, and other pressurized containers.
- Pathogenic or infectious substances.



For this reason, only the essential personnel for the immediate post-accident actions should enter the accident site – and only after taking appropriate precautions.

*Note; All investigators should have equipment to provide protection against pathogenic substances that could be present.*

## Assisting the Police and Judiciary.

If the investigation of an aircraft accident has to be coordinated with a police inquiry of any sort, such as suspected or an actual criminal offence, the investigator will provide assistance. In the event that the preliminary evidence indicates that the accident was the result of any criminal act, responsibility for the investigation will normally be handed over to the Police or the Judiciary.

In general, evidence collected by an investigator as part of an air safety investigation is not taken to be used in court. Investigators do not normally take formal statements from witnesses and confidentiality is paramount.

## Conclusion

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Accident investigators can often learn a great deal from the aircraft wreckage, witnesses, videos and photographic material during the course of an investigation.

The knowledge acquired from the accident may help to prevent the same thing from happening again; therefore, it is imperative not to disturb the accident site, the deceased or ground markings unnecessarily as the opportunity to learn from it will be lost.

It must also be emphasised that we are all human and one has to take into consideration that an accident is a very emotional event that we all dread having to deal with. Anxiety induced by the carnage and destruction might have an adverse effect on whoever may be at the accident site. Thus, it is essential that at the accident site, we should all show respect, sympathy, tolerance and understanding towards each other and respect the victims of the accident and their relatives.

Finally, mature and intelligent people should not take advantage of an accident to ascertain his/her authority or to belittle other agencies or personnel involved in the investigations. We are all equally important; thus, it is only fair that we should all behave respectfully and generously towards each other.

