

NTSB Closes In on Crash Cause

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Erik Wander/KMXT

It appears an improperly installed thumb latch on a luggage panel and a missing guard are to blame for a door that swung open on a chartered Servant Air flight from Kodiak last year. The plane subsequently went into a nosedive and crashed into the bay just off the end of the runway. This, according to a National Transportation Safety Board report released recently. The plane was a Piper PA-31 Navajo Chieftan, an aircraft that has experienced six similar crashes with panels swinging open since 1977, three of which occurred in Alaska.

KMXT's Erik Wander has more.

Clint Johnson is an air traffic accident investigator with the NTSB. He said the report, released over the past weekend, is what's called a factual report and that the probable cause of the accident on January 5th, 2008, is expected soon.

-- (Johnson 1 30 sec. "Just as the name implies ... three weeks from today.")

Johnson said the report is based in part on an interview with the one of the four survivors of the crash.

-- (Johnson 2 25 sec. "We did have a survivor ... crashed into the ocean.")

The Anchorage Daily News reported Tuesday that the "common denominator in pilots losing control when panels come loose has been airplanes having a high gross weight during takeoff," however, Johnson said the plane was just shy of its maximum takeoff weight but within acceptable limits. Johnson said the report is inconclusive regarding similar crashes of Piper aircraft, three of which occurred in Alaska, since 1977.

-- (Johnson 3 52 sec. "All the seats were full ... and a subsequent crash.")

Johnson
said the yearlong investigation uncovered two major issues with the flight that
resulted in the crash.

-- (Johnson 4 49 sec. "The first one was ... significant role in this accident.")

The
chartered flight was flying from Kodiak to Homer, where passengers planned to
celebrate Russian Orthodox Christmas. Officials from Servant Air declined to
comment on the crash or the report. I'm Erik Wander.

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