

Aviation Group Client Update

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AIR SHOW SAFETY AFTER RENO ACCIDENT

Earlier this week, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) held a public hearing to review air show safety regulations in response to the Reno Air Show crash last fall. On September 16, 2011, a World War II-era fighter plane, P-51 Mustang, crashed into a portion of the grandstands at the Reno Air Show, eleven fatalities and 70 injuries were reported.

Previous fatal accidents prompted requirements that grandstands be kept a distance of 500 to 1,500 feet from aircraft, depending on aircraft weight and speed. Aircrafts are no longer allowed to fly over crowds at U.S. shows. FAA officials noted the Agency will review set back distances.

At the meeting, NTSB members were surprised to learn that air show “bosses” decide which pilots are qualified to perform at air shows. There is no accreditation process to determine air show boss qualification requirements. Developing certification for air show bosses could make air shows safer. However, stakeholders testified that current regulations are sufficient for oversight of air shows and races.

Pending changes to FAA Order 8900.1, Flight Standards Information Management System, include updating air show guidance, required experience levels for Inspectors in Charge (IIC), making air race guidance its own section, and reviewing “scatter pattern” formulas. Review of the updated International Council of Air Shows, Inc. (ICAS) Aerobatic Competency Evaluator Manual and changes to Advisory Circular (AC) 105-2D, Sport Parachuting, are also likely. Last, the FAA may develop an online course on approval of aviation events to supplement the current course for IICs. It does not appear the NTSB will make any significant recommendations at this time, but they will continue to monitor the situation.

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