



Chapter 736 Newsletter for January 2011

NTSB Recommends Annual ELT Checks on GA Aircraft

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has issued two safety recommendations to the FAA that would require a detailed inspection at annual of all emergency locator transmitters (ELT) installed on general aviation aircraft to ensure that their mountings maintain their retention capabilities during an accident. The recommendations come as a result of NTSB's investigation into the August 2010 fatal crash of a de Havilland turbine Otter airplane in Alaska.

According to the NTSB, the aircraft's ELT was found loose on the floor of the airplane by a pararescuer at the crash scene. It had activated but was separated from its mounting bracket and antenna; thus, satellite and aircraft involved in the aerial search did not detect vital aircraft registration information and the global positioning system coordinates that would have hastened SAR. Nor did the unit transmit the 121.5 MHz homing signal detectable locally by other aircraft, air traffic control facilities, or rescue personnel who use a compatible receiver.

Nearly five hours after the crash, volunteer airborne search personnel located the aircraft approximately 19 miles from where the flight originated. Four passengers were seriously injured. NTSB states that had the ELT remained attached to the mounting tray, it is likely that the signal would have been detected soon after the accident, and search and rescue personnel could have been dispatched directly to the accident site hours earlier.

The NTSB acknowledged that ELTs are already required to be inspected every 12 months by Federal Aviation Regulation 91.207, and that the inspections must include checking for "proper installation." AOPA maintains that there is no need to duplicate this requirement, and that the FAA could better address the issue by providing those inspecting ELTs with additional information on properly inspecting the mounting.

The board was unable to determine why the ELT separated from its mounting but expressed concern that similar ELTs may not be properly mounted. It also recommended that the FAA determine if the mounting requirements and tests in the technical standard order (TSO) for ELTs are adequate and, if necessary, that it revise the requirements.

Auto-Landing on the Horizon?

A new iPad app from X-Plane creator Austin Meyer may one day be able to be used to safely land an airplane in the event the pilot-in-command becomes incapacitated. Today, EFIS-App works with an iPad linked wirelessly to the X-Plane simulator program and, within the sim, automatically finds a nearby airport and instructs the flight control computer to glide in for a safe landing, reports PopularMechanics.com.

Meyer, who is building a Lancair Evolution expected to be completed in 2011, intends to connect the app to his airplane's flight control system and, using the onboard satellite navigation data, allow it to perform a landing. EFIS-App would find airports within gliding range, assessing distance, obstacles, runway lengths, etc., then manipulate the flight controls accordingly to steer toward the best option.

After descending through a series of waypoints, the software would set up for a standard instrument approach and, if applicable, the non-pilot passenger would manually deploy the landing gear. If it works he will make it available to other Evolution owners and seek to obtain certification for other aircraft types.

Maine Eyes Repealing Plane Tax

While it may have seemed like a good thing when it was introduced, Maine legislators on both sides of the house now seem unified in getting rid of a controversial "use tax" on private aircraft. Under the law, anyone who's purchased an airplane in the previous year in a state that doesn't charge sales tax on airplanes and has it Maine for more than 20 days will be sent a bill for five percent of the value of the aircraft by the state. "I've seen some pretty tall sales tax bills go out to people who didn't know the law and brought their planes here to get service or to go on vacation," a spokesman said. But what may have brought the issue more into focus for Maine's lawmakers is the chilling effect it is having on the fledgling aerospace industry.

Earlier this year, the sprawling Brunswick Naval Air Station was closed and is in the process of being handed over the state, which is promoting it as an aviation business park. It's already landed Kestrel Aircraft but the tax is causing some inconvenience for the new enterprise. The owners of Kestrel have to land their plane in Portsmouth (New Hampshire) and drive up. Portsmouth is about 80 miles from the new plant. The stirrings in the Maine legislature have the endorsement of aviation groups and the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority, which is trying to attract new business to the old Navy base. There is no question that the repeal of this use-tax would provide a real economic boost to Brunswick and communities all across the state by leveling the

playing field in attracting new aviation businesses and by welcoming visiting aircraft back into Maine.

Representatives urge no backtracking on aviation user fees

Reps. Tom Petri ((R-Wis.) and Jerry Costello (D-Ill.), senior members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure committee both known for strong statements against general aviation user fees, are again championing a no-new-user-fee letter to President Barack Obama urging him to reject any user fee proposals in his Fiscal Year 2012 budget.

“We want to reiterate that a user fee proposal would be a step backward,” said Costello in a statement released Jan. 7. “This is an issue that we have had bipartisan agreement on in recent years and there is no reason to reconsider it. I will not support a budget or an FAA Reauthorization bill that includes user fees.”

The two lawmakers waged a similar campaign in 2009 that received strong bipartisan backing, with 118 House members, more than a quarter of the full House, signing on to a letter urging against user fees. Petri and Costello argued then that reopening the debate on user fees for the FY 2011 budget would take Congress’s attention away from the addressing Next Generation air transportation system modernization (NextGen). No user fee proposal was included in that year’s budget.

In announcing their new letter, Costello reiterated support for “maintaining the current mechanism of using fuel taxes to support the Aviation Trust Fund.”

Next meeting

Our next meeting will be held on Tues., Jan. 18 at the Weathervane Restaurant in Waterville. As is our usual custom, if you plan to have dinner, please arrive around 6:00 pm so the regular meeting can begin at 7:30 pm.