

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: August 24, 1979

Forwarded to:

Honorable Langhorne M. Bond
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
Washington, D.C. 20591

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

A-79-67

On September 2, 1978, an Antilles Air Boats, Inc., Grumman 21A, struck the water while on a passenger flight from St. Croix to St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands. The aircraft broke apart and the captain and 3 of the 10 passengers drowned.

The aircraft was not required to have liferafts or approved flotation-type seat cushions on board, nor was it so equipped. Individual life preservers were located underneath each seat.

The Board's investigation revealed that before takeoff the captain only advised the passengers to fasten their seatbelts; he did not brief them on the location of survival equipment as was required by 14 CFR 135.81, "Briefing of Passengers Before Flight," which was in effect at that time. Thus, putting aside whether sufficient time had been available to retrieve and don the life preservers, the passengers may not have known about the availability of them. In fact, no warning of an impending emergency landing was given to the passengers.

Seven of the 10 passengers survived because they clung to floating aircraft debris. Several passengers attempted to use seat cushions; however, these cushions were covered with a vinyl material which became too slippery to hold in the water. There were no straps or handholds to facilitate grasping the cushions.

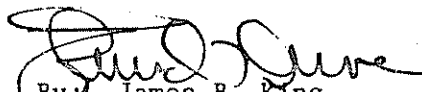
The Safety Board's accident investigation experience shows that, in many cases in which aircraft inadvertently crash in water, the most readily available means of flotation is seat cushions. The most recent example was the National Airlines Boeing 727 accident near Pensacola, Florida, on May 8, 1978. Although life preservers were made available to

some passengers in this case, many did not have time to obtain a life preserver because the cabin was inundated almost immediately. Many passengers had to rely on the seat cushions which were not approved flotation devices. As a result, the Board recommended that the Federal Aviation Administration amend 14 CFR 121.340 to require that all passenger-carrying air carrier aircraft be equipped with approved flotation-type seat cushions (Safety Recommendation A-79-36).

The Antilles Air Boats accident again shows the need for a readily available means of flotation in water accidents when insufficient time is available to retrieve and don more conventional flotation equipment. Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the Federal Aviation Administration:

Amend 14 CFR 135 to require all aircraft conducting passenger service under Part 135 in any overwater operation be equipped with approved flotation-type seat cushions, and to require aircraft conducting extended overwater operations to also be equipped with an approved life preserver equipped with an approved survivor locator light. (A-79-67) (Class II - Priority Action)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, GOLDMAN, and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in this recommendation.


By: James B. King
Chairman