

Definition of accident and serious incident

Background

ICAO Annex 13, Chapter 1 has the following definitions:

Accident. *An occurrence associated with the operation of an aircraft which, in the case of a manned aircraft, takes place between the time any person boards the aircraft with the intention of flight until such time as all such persons have disembarked, or in the case of an unmanned aircraft, takes place between the time the aircraft is ready to move with the purpose of flight until such time as it comes to rest at the end of the flight and the primary propulsion system is shut down, in which [...]"*

Serious incident. *An incident involving circumstances indicating that there was a high probability of an accident and associated with the operation of an aircraft which, in the case of a manned aircraft, takes place between the time any person boards the aircraft with the intention of flight until such time as all such persons have disembarked, or in the case of an unmanned aircraft, takes place between the time the aircraft is ready to move with the purpose of flight until such time as it comes to rest at the end of the flight and the primary propulsion system is shut down.*

PROBLEM

There are regular occurrences outside the scope of these ICAO definitions that can be very relevant to the safe operation of aircraft. Here are a few recent examples.

On 12 July 2013 at London Heathrow airport, UK, a fire event occurred on a parked, unoccupied and electrically unpowered Ethiopian Airlines B787. The fire-affected area, located above the cabin ceiling, typically doesn't have means of fire detection or suppression. Had this event occurred in flight, it would have posed a significant safety concern and raise challenges for extinguishing it. On 14 April 2014 at Yangon airport, Burma, a Golden Myanmar A320 was left unattended and unsecured, started moving on its own, and subsequently collided with the tail of a parked Myanmar Airways International A319, leading to substantial damage to both aircraft. On 4 June 2014 at Rome-Ciampino airport, Italy, a Ryanair B737-800 sustained damage to the right horizontal stabiliser after it rolled backwards into a building. And on 14 June 2014 at Sialkot airport, Pakistan, a Shaheen Air B737 sustained substantial damage when bricks came loose from the pavement following a high power engine run-up, and struck the horizontal stabilizer.

Fortunately there were no reported injuries in these cases, but sudden fires onboard parked aircraft, aircraft moving on their own or pavement being dislodged, are obviously the result of a safety breakdown and represent a major risk. Yet, again, under the current ICAO definition these events are not considered "accidents" as they did not take place "between the time any person boarded the aircraft with the intention of flight until such time as all such persons disembarked". There was therefore no ICAO requirement for an investigation.

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Conclusion

It is clear that these occurrences have safety implications and the potential for "lessons learned". IFALPA argues that a full size investigation into these investigations and a timely report would be of great benefit to the industry. The Federation once again submits that handling and maintenance events which occur at a time when there are no persons on-board the aircraft with the intention of flight and lead to serious injuries or substantial damage to the aircraft are equally important for flight safety purposes and should be recognized by ICAO as accidents. The Federation therefore believes that the current ICAO definition is too restrictive and should be revised to include the occurrences described above.