

NTSB Updates and Expands Reporting Requirements



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Part 830 now addresses blank screens in the cockpit.

A BLANK STARE FROM YOUR COPILOT MAY ANNOY but that is not as disconcerting as an instrument panel full of blank screens. The NTSB has now updated Part 830, effective March 8, updating and increasing the number of reportable “incidents” to include glass panel failures.

While most Federal Aviation Regulations books include Part 830, pilots should understand that the section contains NTSB regulations, not FARs. The NTSB has its own reporting requirements, separate and apart from the FAA. These rules are designed to aid in the safety investigations that are the core of the NTSB’s mission. Pilots are trained and tested on their knowledge of Part 830 and now that training and testing will need to be updated.

One of the most interesting additions to the list of reportable incidents is “a complete loss of information, excluding flickering, from more than 50 percent of an aircraft’s cockpit displays.” The cockpit displays about which the NTSB wants failure reports include those of EFIS, Engine Indication and Crew Alerting Systems (EICAS), Electronic Centralized Aircraft Monitors (ECAM) or “other displays of this type, which generally include a primary flight display (PFD), primary navigation display (PND) and other integrated displays.”

The NTSB has never required notification in the event of failure of vacuum-driven instruments, and if your “steam gauges” quit there is still no notification requirement. The Safety Board has long required notification after, “Inflight failure of electrical systems that requires the sustained use of an emergency bus powered by a backup source such as a battery, auxiliary power unit or air-driven generator to retain flight control or essential instruments,” but only in aircraft with an MTOW exceeding 12,500 pounds. The pervasiveness of glass cockpits has altered data delivery and clearly caught the interest of the NTSB. Having experienced a total loss of an aircraft’s cockpit displays, I look forward to the data and recommendations that will emerge from the NTSB’s work in this area. My own hearty recommendation is to retain backup steam gauges readable in times of low light and high anxiety.

Another technology that has made its way into Part 830 is the Aircraft Collision Avoidance System. The NTSB now requires notification of ACAS resolution advisories issued either when an aircraft is being operated on an IFR flight plan and compliance with the advisory is necessary, or to any aircraft flying in Class A airspace.

The NTSB has also added reporting requirements for incidents involving engines, propellers and rotors. Pilots must now report

“Failure of any internal turbine engine component that results in the escape of debris other than out the exhaust path.” If engine “debris” enters the cabin during flight, remember to keep it and call the NTSB.

If you lose “all or a portion of” a propeller blade, the NTSB wants to know, unless you lost a chunk of blade due to “ground contact.” It doesn’t take a federal investigation to figure out why the propeller broke if you hit the ground with it. The usual suspects are failure to deal with a crosswind or to extend the landing gear. However, the NTSB expects a report of “Damage to helicopter tail or main rotor blades, including ground damage, that requires major repair or replacement of the blade[s].” Why? Because the types of pilot error that can lead to helicopter blade ground contact are many, varied and still not fully understood.

The NTSB has added an “air carrier only” reporting requirement that has obvious roots in recent high-profile accidents. Air carriers are now required to report if an aircraft lands or departs on a taxiway, incorrect runway or other area not designed as a runway. They are also required to report if their crews experience a runway incursion that requires the operator or the crew of another aircraft or vehicle to take immediate corrective action to avoid a collision.

These are the first significant changes to Part 830 in more than a decade. While reviewing these changes, pilots and flight operations managers ought to review the section’s requirements and procedures in general. If something went wrong in flight, review 830.5 Immediate Notification to determine if a reportable incident occurred. For instance, an inflight fire must be reported to the NTSB, even if it did not result in injury or accident and regardless of the size of aircraft or type of operation. The next step is to go to the NTSB Web site, www.nts.gov. There you will find NTSB Form 6121.1, Pilot/Operator Aircraft/Accident Report and contact information for the NTSB headquarters in Washington, D.C., as well as the five NTSB Field Offices. A phone call is sufficient to start the immediate notification process, but Form 6121.1 will be required. You can complete the form online and save a copy, but the NTSB does not (yet) accept the form except by fax or mail.

One of the reportable incidents that has caused unnecessary confusion over the years doesn’t involve any failure of the aircraft. “Inability of any required flight crewmember to perform normal flight duties” is a reportable “incident,” but *only* if the “inability” is a result of injury or illness. Inability to perform normal flight duties as a result of poor training or a lack of coffee in the morning

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does not have to be reported to the NTSB by crewmembers. Of course, ATC might file a report, but that will go to the FAA, not the NTSB.

In reviewing these procedures, remember that the definition of "accident" under the NTSB rules excludes many common mishaps. An accident is defined as "an occurrence associated with the operation of an aircraft that takes place between the time any person boards the aircraft with the intention of flight and all such persons have disembarked, and in which any person suffers death or serious injury, or in which the aircraft receives substantial damage." If a mechanic taxis out to perform an engine run-up and runs into a truck, there is no "accident" to report because there was no "intention of flight." However, this incident might be a reportable "incident" if it involved "damage to property, other than the aircraft, estimated to exceed \$25,000 for repair [including materials and labor] or fair market value in the event of total loss, whichever is less." This \$25,000 repair definition has caused confusion in the industry for many years. The \$25,000 repair definition *only* applies to something other than the aircraft. A bad day that results in more than \$25,000 in aircraft repairs may *not* result in a required report.

Meanwhile, "substantial" aircraft damage means "damage or failure that adversely affects the structural strength, performance or flight characteristics of the aircraft, and that would normally require major repair or replacement of the affected component. Engine failure or damage limited to an engine if only one engine fails or is damaged, bent fairings or cowling, dented skin, small punctured holes in the skin or fabric, ground damage to rotor or propeller blades, and damage to landing gear, wheels, tires, flaps, engine accessories, brakes or wingtips are not considered 'substantial damage.'"

It is clear from the list of exclusions in the definition of "substantial damage" that the NTSB did not want to spend its time investigating gear-up landings and ground loops (ask a tail-dragger pilot if you don't know). Be aware that the NTSB typically delegates small aircraft accidents to the FAA for investigation. Both the FAA and the NTSB have suffered budget constraints for years now. Be respectful of their time and resources. Don't bring an investigation on yourself or your company by reporting an "accident" or "incident" if a quick review of Part 830 would have shown that no report was required. Attorneys are fond of saying that "you can't un-ring a bell." Don't ring the bell unless you must. ■