

Why is the FBI Involved in an Aviation Disaster?

Normally the National Transportation Safety Board is required to investigate airline disasters. However, in the event of a criminal aviation disaster, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has the lead in the investigation.

What is Involved in a Criminal Aviation Investigation?

Upon notification of a criminal aviation disaster, the FBI deploys what is commonly referred to as a "Fly-Team." On 24-hour alert, this team of experienced FBI personnel responds to and leads the criminal investigation. In a criminal aviation disaster, the Fly-Team is led by the Investigator-in-Charge and includes other special agents and support staff trained in criminal investigations. The Office for Victim Assistance (OVA) coordinates the resources of a variety of agencies which are involved in providing assistance to families. Media interactions are organized by the FBI Public Affairs Officer.

How Does the FBI Support Families?

The Aviation Disaster Family Assistance Act of 1996 requires the coordination of the disaster response. The Federal Family Assistance Plan for Criminal Aviation of 2004 requires that the FBI coordinates the disaster response for a criminal aviation event. The FBI's staff of specially trained responders works closely with federal, state, local and volunteer agencies and the airline to meet the needs of criminal aviation disaster victims and their families. Family counseling, victim identification and forensic services, translation services, and communication with foreign governments are some of the services that the FBI coordinates.

The OVA provides information to family members following a criminal aviation disaster. While on scene, OVA personnel coordinate briefings and provide updates on the investigation to family members. Once the on-scene phase of the investigation is over, OVA is the primary provider of information for family members as the investigation proceeds.

Family Assistance Center

Soon after a criminal aviation incident, OVA personnel arrive on scene and establish a Family Assistance Center (FAC) at a hotel or other meeting facility agreed upon by the airline and the OVA Program Director. Consideration is given to security, quality of rooms and facilities, and privacy for family members when selecting the FAC location. In addition, a Joint Family Support Operations Center (JFSOC) is established and will serve as the focal point for coordination between representatives from Federal agencies and local government emergency services. Information for daily family briefings is obtained through the JFSOC.

On occasion, an FBI Public Affairs Officer is assigned to the FAC. During the initial family briefing, families are advised of the media presence outside the FAC. The FBI will make every effort to protect privacy. Family members are free to speak to the media. However, the FBI will not coordinate or attend family interviews with the media.

Daily Family Briefings

OVA staff coordinates a family briefing at least once a day at the FAC. This briefing updates families on the progress of the investigation and allows for questions to be asked of the Investigator-in-Charge, other FBI personnel, the medical examiner or coroner, and other parties of the investigation. For family unable to travel to the FAC, a telephone conference bridge allows for full participation in the briefing. For security, a new password is given each day to access the conference bridge.

Upon arrival at the FAC, family members are issued a badge. These badges are required for admittance to the family briefings.

Assisting Families of Foreign Victims

If foreign victims are involved in the disaster, the Department of State works with OVA staff, the airline and other agencies to obtain medical records, secure translation services, provide official notification to foreign governments, extend or grant visas, and facilitate consulate and customs services for the return of identified remains.

Medical Information

Identifying the victims of a criminal aviation incident is a thorough scientific process. All victim identification and death certification issues are the responsibility of the local medical examiner or coroner. To assist forensic specialists in this effort, family members will be asked for information regarding the victim's medical and dental history, also known as antemortem information. Each family will be interviewed by a person representing the local medical examiner or coroner and will be asked to complete an antemortem questionnaire. The information collected in this questionnaire is the primary source of information used by forensic scientists to make a positive identification. Typically DNA reference samples are also collected from the family members at this time. Information provided in the questionnaires as well as any relevant DNA data is confidential and used only for identification purposes. While providing this information is voluntary, it is strongly recommended.

Memorial Services

If family members desire a memorial service, the American Red Cross will arrange a suitable interfaith service in the days following the incident. Family members are informed of the details at family briefings.

Personal Effects

Returning personal effects is the responsibility of the airline. Air carriers often designate a third party vendor to coordinate this process. Contact information for the vendor will be provided at the family briefings. Some personal effects may need to be held as evidence. These personal effects will be maintained in good condition, and every effort will be made to see that they are returned to you as quickly as possible once they are no longer needed as evidence.

Participating Organizations

As the coordinator for Federal assistance in a criminal aviation disaster, the FBI may request support from the following Federal agencies and other organizations in accordance with the Federal Family Assistance Plan for Criminal Aviation Disasters:

American Red Cross

Department of Defense

Department of Homeland Security

Federal Emergency Management Agency

Department of Justice

Department of State

National Transportation Safety Board

The support of state, county and local governments is also required.

OVA Contact and Web Site Information

Office for Victim Assistance staff may be contacted Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. (EST) by calling toll free at (866) 828-5320 or 202-324-3307 or by e-mail at victim.assistance@ic.fbi.gov.

The Office for Victim Assistance has a website: <http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/victimassist/home/htm>.

This site contains information for victims of federal crimes. In the event of a major criminal aviation disaster, a special web site for families may be created. Detailed information regarding the special web site address and access to the site will be given during the family briefing. FBI criminal investigations are thorough and, as such, may take a period of time to complete. Information on the site is updated as the investigation proceeds.

Limited Confidentiality Statement

Your Victim Specialist is here to assist you as you go through the criminal justice process and is working as part of a team with the FBI Special Agent and personnel from the U.S. Attorney's Office. Discussions that you have with your Victim Specialist may not be considered completely confidential. As part of the team, there may be times when your Victim Specialist needs to share information you provide with the other team members. If you have questions about limited confidentiality, contact your Victim Specialist for clarification.

The FBI Office for Victim Assistance is committed to providing you and your family with the most appropriate services to assist in reducing the effects of trauma. Your Victim Specialist is highly trained to assess your needs and link you to the best resources available. It is important that you work closely with your Victim Specialist. Your Victim Specialist can assist in making your experience with the criminal justice process a smooth one.

Important Contact Numbers

FBI Victim Specialist

Name:

Phone:

FBI Special Agent

Name:

Phone:



Federal Bureau of Investigation
Office for Victim Assistance
J. Edgar Hoover Building, Room 3329
935 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington D.C. 20535
(877) 236-8947
www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/victimassist/home.htm

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Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Office for Victim Assistance



Information for Friends and Family

Criminal Aviation Investigations