

AVIATION ACCIDENTS IN OREGON

The fiery explosion last month in a residential area ignited when an airplane departing the Hillsboro Airport crashed in a nearby neighborhood has understandably caused many residents to ponder the dangers that aviation activities pose to their lives and to their properties. In this tragic instance the pilot was killed, one home was totally destroyed, and three others were damaged. The data discussed below suggests that this was not an isolated incident.

Though there has been a significant decrease in the number of commercial passenger service airline accidents over the years, the same cannot be said for general aviation. According to preliminary statistics made available by the National Transportation and Safety Board (www.nts.gov) 32 accidents and 22 fatalities on commercial US air carriers occurred in the US in 2005. By contrast there were 1,669 general aviation accidents and 562 fatalities during this same time frame. This is 52 times more accidents and 25 times more fatalities than with commercial flights.

Specific to Oregon, a review of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) website (www.nts.gov) yielded 21 preliminary and final reports on aviation accidents including seven fatalities from January through July of 2006. Of this number 20 were classified as accidents and one as an incident. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) defines an incident as an event that causes neither actual bodily harm to the occupants nor physical damage to the aircraft. An accident on the other hand is an event that causes either death or injury to the occupants of the aircraft or an event that substantially damages the aircraft.

20% of Jan-July 2006 Oregon Aviation Accidents Occurred in Washington County
Four of the accidents (20 %), including two fatalities, occurred in Washington County. One death took place during the Oregon International Airshow when a 73 year old man perished after the aircraft he was piloting exploded upon impacting a residential community. The other death occurred on January 5, 2006, when a private pilot attempting an emergency landing crashed into a filbert orchard near Sunset Airstrip in North Plains. According to preliminary NTSB reports prior to his death he had requested permission to perform visual flight approaches to the Hillsboro Airport. Both of the above mentioned flights originated from Hillsboro Airport, a Port of Portland owned and operated facility that has a long history of putting area residents at risk by accommodating dangerous aerobatic activities and by actively encouraging flight training and practice activities over urban and rural communities. Three of the four accidents involved aircraft arriving or departing from Hillsboro Airport.

Washington County residents are routinely subjected to more air traffic than any other county in the entire state of Oregon. The vast majority of these flights are general aviation and flight training operations that serve less than one third of one percent of the population, largely at taxpayer expense. Many of the aviation students are recruited from out of the state and out of the country. No other county in Oregon has a general aviation airport that begins to rival Hillsboro Airport in terms of annual operational count. Most airports in the state log no more than 100,000 operations per year, often far

fewer, whereas people in Washington County are routinely pelted with aviation noise, pollution, and safety hazards generated by more than a quarter million annual operations from Hillsboro Airport alone.

Emergency Landing Accidents

Ten of Oregon's twenty accidents, and all of the fatalities, involved off-airport forced emergency landings or actual crashes. At least four others involved off-runway accidents either near or on airport property. In one case, on May 30, 2006, a Cessna collided with an automobile on a taxiway at the Aurora State Airport. On March 4, 2006, a Piper experienced an uncontrolled descent shortly after takeoff and on March 3, 2006, a Piper slid off a runway into a snow and ice covered field.

Flight Training and Practice Accidents

Six of Oregon's accidents involved instructional or practice flights.

* On May 28, 2006, a pilot practicing high speed taxis in Grants Pass impacted power lines while making an emergency landing in a parking lot.

* On May 19, 2006, a Hughes Helicopter registered to Applebee Aviation flying out of Hillsboro Airport sustained substantial damage during a hard landing at Skyport Airport. The commercial pilot who was taking a test for issuance of a flight instructor certificate apparently experienced a miscommunication with the examiner on board which led to the accident. The first pilot had a total of 201 flight hours.

* On March 28, 2006, a Cessna owned by Willamette Aviation sustained substantial damage when a student pilot with a total of 66 flight hours experienced a hard landing at Aurora Airport.

* On February 23, 2006, a student pilot with a total of 56 flight hours experienced a loss of engine power while performing maneuvers in a practice area near Hillsboro, Oregon. At the time of the accident he was the sole occupant of an aircraft which was registered to Stark's Twin Oaks. Due to the difficulties he encountered which the NTSB attributed to pilot error, he elected to land in an off airport field.

* On February 23, 2006, a flight instructor and student pilot both sustained minor injuries while engaged in an off airport emergency landing. The Mooney they were piloting collided with trees near the Cottage Grove Airport.

* On January 5, 2006, a pilot perished when his plane crashed in a filbert orchard near Sunset Airstrip in North Plains. Preliminary reports stated that the pilot was performing practice visual approaches to the Hillsboro Airport at the time the tragedy occurred.

Helicopter Accidents

Three of Oregon's twenty accidents involved helicopters, one of which was instructional in nature. No injuries were sustained. The other two were related to logging. One led to

a fatality the other to a minor injury. Both of the logging accidents required off airport emergency landings.

Oregon International Airshow Tragedy

Late in the afternoon on July 16, 2006 Robert Guilford perished, one home was destroyed, and three others were damaged during the Oregon International Airshow when the aircraft piloted by Guilford lost power before crashing into a densely populated residential area approximately one half mile from Hillsboro Airport. Fortunately no one on the ground was injured. Due to the highly flammable nature of aviation jet fuel it took fire fighters over 12 hours to extinguish the blaze.

The pilot was participating in the show, not as an aerobatic performer, but rather to display his Hawker Siddeley Hunter MK 58 war plane. The disaster occurred shortly after Guilford, an aviation attorney with over 4000 hours of flying experience, was given clearance to do a low-pass fly by while departing Hillsboro Airport on route for his return trip to Van Nuys, California. An FAA spokesman estimated that it may take from thirty day to two years to complete the investigation on this catastrophe.

Even with thousands of hours of flying experience, Guilford was unable to avert this terrible tragedy. This event underscores the dangers for residents on the ground who are routinely subjected to aviation training and overflights, in many cases performed by pilots who have minimal or no actual flying experience.

An article in the July 21, 2006, Hillsboro Argus indicates that this was not the first accident for Guilford. In September of 1989 he and a person on the ground sustained serious injuries when the plane he was piloting lost power and crashed into a residence in Mar Vista, California. The NTSB attributed the probable cause of the accident to "the pilot's poor in-flight planning" and further stated that the failure of an intake valve may also have been a contributing factor.

2005 Aviation Accidents in Oregon

A review of the NTSB website yielded 55 records specific to aviation accidents in Oregon in 2005. Twenty one people died as a result of these tragedies.

During 2005, Oregon logged more aviation accidents than all but seven states - California, Florida, Texas, Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, and Washington. In fact, there were more aviation accidents in Oregon than in all the New England States combined, despite the fact that the population of New England is nearly 4 times greater than Oregon's. In addition the fatalities in Oregon were more than 25% higher than in New England.

Washington State with a population of 6.2 million compared to 3.6 million in Oregon logged 60 accidents and 17 aviation fatalities, 4 fewer fatalities than in Oregon.

It is noteworthy that the eight states listed above with the highest number of aviation accidents are also states where Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University has a presence. Embry-Riddle began offering degree programs in the Portland area several years ago.

Rough estimates indicate that close to half of the more than one quarter of a million operations that take place at Hillsboro Airport each year are related to flight training activity. A significant number of prospective pilots are enrolled in the taxpayer subsidized Aviation Sciences program offered through Portland Community College (PCC). They are told that they have the right to fly wherever, whenever they want regardless of the noise, pollution, and safety impacts incurred by established residents who are negatively impacted by flight training activities.

Port of Portland Shifting Air Traffic from PDX to Hillsboro

Contributing factors to this significant increase in aviation accidents and fatalities, particularly in Washington County, may be related to efforts by the Port of Portland to shift aviation activity away from Portland International Airport (PDX) to Hillsboro Airport. Fiscal year aviation statistics for 2005 at www.portofportland.com reflect a 19.3% decrease in general aviation operations and a 3.5 % decrease in military activity at PDX. Port of Portland owned and operated Troutdale Airport experienced a 4.7% decrease as well. By contrast Hillsboro Airport incurred a 15.3% increase in operations. One of the major shortcomings of the Port's website is their failure to break out types of operation at the Hillsboro Airport as they do for PDX, thus it is difficult to determine exactly when and where these shifts are occurring.

An important aspect of general aviation regulations or lack thereof is the absence of FAA minimum age requirements for being behind the controls of an aircraft, other than that the person piloting the aircraft must be big enough to reach the controls. This means that small children can legally fly an aircraft as long as a pilot is on board.

Negative Impacts of Aviation Activity on Washington County Residents

If the governor-appointed Board of Port of Portland Commissioners and the governor-appointed Oregon State Board of Aviation, in their eagerness to cater to the well-heeled aviation industry, continue to exhibit their long established pattern of disregard and indifference to the safety, livability, and security concerns of area residents, it is likely that risks associated with aviation activity will significantly increase as will the erosion of the quality of life. At present plans are underway to invest millions of taxpayer dollars to add a third runway and to promote additional growth at Hillsboro Airport primarily to accommodate the highly accident prone, noisy, and intrusive general aviation flight training and private pilot community. In addition, state and county elected officials are poised to force increased general aviation and flight training activity on rural communities despite widespread outrage and opposition.

The Port of Portland and the State Department of Aviation have had ample warning of the dangers posed by general aviation activities. Warnings that they have systematically chosen to ignore in their seemingly endless pursuit of airport expansion, their quest for the almighty dollar, and their obsessive desire to slavishly pander to the aviation industry.

Whom to Contact

To let policy makers know your views on this very serious and timely issue contact your elected officials.

LOCAL

City of Hillsboro Mayor and City Council

150 East Main Street

Hillsboro, Oregon 97123

503-681-6219

www.ci.hillsboro.or.us

Tom Hughes (Mayor), Council members – Ed Dennis, Nenice Andrews, Doug Johnson, Cynthia O'Donnell

Washington County Commissioners

155 N. First Avenue, Suite 300

Hillsboro, Oregon 97124

503-846-8681

Tom Brian (Chair), Andy Duyck, John Leeper, Roy Rogers, Dick Schouten

Helicopter Complaints

John Helm

Director, Northwest Rotorcraft Association

111 SW Fifth Ave., Suite 3500

Portland, Oregon 97204

503-286-0927

Port of Portland Noise Office

Noise Complaint Hotline: 503.460.4100 or 800.938.6647

Noise Management Office: 503.460.4073 or 800.547.4073 ext. 7052

STATE

Governor Ted Kulongoski

900 Court. St. NE

Salem, Oregon 97301

503-378-3111

Oregon Department of Aviation

3040 25th St. SE

Salem, Oregon 97302-1125

Aviation.mail@state.or.us

Phone: 503-378-4880

Fax: 503-373-1688

Senator Betsy Johnson

900 Court St. NE S-314

Salem, Oregon 97301
sen.betsyjohnson@state.or.us
503-986-1716

Senator Bruce Starr
Interim Address:
22115 NW Imbrie Dr. #290
Hillsboro, OR, 97124
Interim Phone: 503-649-4391
Session Address:
900 Court St. NE, S-205
Salem, OR 97301
Session Phone: 503-986-1715

Representative Deborah Boone
900 Court St. NE H-375
Salem, Oregon 97301
rep.deborahboone@state.or.us
503-986-1432

Representative Chuck Riley
900 Court St. NE H-487
Salem, Oregon 97301
rep.chuckriley@state.or.us
503-986-1429

To locate State senators and representatives not included on the above list click on
www.leg.state.or.us/findlegsltr/

FEDERAL

Senator Gordon Smith
One World Trade Center
121 Salmon, Suite 1250
Portland, Oregon 97204
503-326-3386
<http://www.gssmith.senate.gov>

Senator Ron Wyden
700 NE Multnomah
Suite 450
Portland, Oregon 97232
503-326-7525

Representative David Wu
Gus Solomon Building

620 SW Main, #606
Portland, Oregon 97214
503-326-2901
<http://www.house.gov/writerep>

Federal Aviation Admin (FAA)
Flight Standards District Office
3180 NW 229th Ave
Hillsboro, OR 97124
503-615-3200

To subscribe or unsubscribe contact info@OregonAviationRevealed.org

Miki Barnes
miki@psg.com