



United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Office of Special Investigations

B-259621

December 29, 1994

The Honorable Robert A. Borski  
Chairman  
The Honorable James M. Inhofe  
Ranking Minority Member  
Subcommittee on Investigations  
and Oversight  
Committee on Public Works  
and Transportation  
House of Representatives

This letter responds to your letter of March 21, 1994, in which you asked us to investigate whether eligible employees of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) were abusing their authority to use access-to-aircraft privileges aboard commercial aircraft. Our investigation focused on use of the privileges on the flight deck or in the cockpit of the aircraft.

In November 1994, your offices advised us that our findings at NTSB headquarters were sufficient to address the Subcommittee's concerns. Your offices also advised us that in light of an ongoing Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General audit of jumpseat<sup>1</sup> use by FAA personnel, further OSI investigation at FAA would not be required.

In summary, we found that a number of NTSB employees were using access to aircraft on "must fly" status for various reasons, including travel to training, instead of "space available" status, as they should have done. To travel under this program, NTSB employees must indicate the "space available" or "must fly" status on the Form 7000-5 access-to-aircraft coupons. Apparently, NTSB management does not oversee the appropriateness of which status the employees indicate. Also, NTSB Order 52-A, regarding use of the access-to-aircraft authority, contains no provision for retaining the used Form 7000-5 access-to-aircraft coupon

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<sup>1</sup>"Jumpseat" is a vernacular term for the extra seat in the cockpit of the aircraft.



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booklets, which identify "must fly" or "space available" status.

#### ACCESS TO AIRCRAFT AND "MUST FLY" STATUS

Approved NTSB personnel use access-to-aircraft privileges for any NTSB-related business. Nothing in Order 52-A prohibits such use of the access-to-aircraft authority, which it defines as the "authority for admission to the flight deck or passenger compartments of U.S. certificated carriers while receiving free transportation for NTSB employees in travel status." For example, NTSB has used access-to-aircraft privileges to reduce the cost of other programs, such as travel to training. NTSB Order 52-A further states that the request for access to aircraft ". . . is to be made on a "space available" basis if the purpose of the flight is for observation and familiarization, and on a "must fly" basis only when the employee is required to proceed immediately to the scene of an accident."

However, on several occasions between July 1992 and December 1993, the period we reviewed, a number of NTSB employees used access-to-aircraft privileges on a "must fly" basis, in violation of NTSB Order 52-A. (This order and other regulations governing the access-to-aircraft program are further discussed in enclosure I.) We noted "must fly" travel for attendance at training seminars; conferences; and, on one occasion, an NTSB hearing. We informed the appropriate NTSB officials regarding this issue.

#### ACCESS TO AIRCRAFT AND THE FORM 7000-5 COUPON BOOKLETS

Employees who are approved for access-to-aircraft privileges receive credentials authorizing entry into the pilot compartments of U.S. commercial air carrier aircraft. The appropriate managing director authorizes access to aircraft upon the request of the employee's immediate supervisor, who is responsible for control of the NTSB Form 7000-5 (Access to Aircraft).

Approved employees receive a booklet of 25 Form 7000-5s. At the time of use, the employee indicates, among other items, a designation-of-use status reflecting "must fly" or "space available." The original coupon goes to the carrier, and a copy stays in the coupon booklet. When the employee has exhausted the coupons, the completed booklet is returned to the disbursing official, and a new booklet of forms is provided to the employee.



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At NTSB Headquarters, the Chief of the Facilities Division disburses Form 7000-5 coupon booklets to the administrative assistants for the Office of Research and Engineering and the Office of Aviation Safety. These offices maintain records regarding Form 7000-5 coupon booklets within their respective offices. Each administrative assistant has retained used coupon booklets for about the past 4 years. Records prior to that time have been destroyed. When we reviewed NTSB Order 52-A, we found no provisions regarding time frames for retention of used 7000-5 coupon booklets.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CHAIRMAN, NTSB

To help deter future abuses, we recommend that the Chairman, NTSB

- reinforce to all NTSB employees the provisions of NTSB Order 52-A regarding the use of access-to-aircraft privileges and
- examine ways to improve internal controls over NTSB use of access-to-aircraft privileges through retention and periodic review of the coupon booklets provided to NTSB employees.

#### METHODOLOGY

We conducted our investigation from April to November 1994. We reviewed applicable NTSB and FAA laws, regulations, correspondence, and documents. At the NTSB Washington, D.C., headquarters, we randomly selected and reviewed used access-to-aircraft Form 7000-5 booklets and corresponding travel vouchers for various NTSB headquarters employees for the period of July 1992 through December 1993.

We also interviewed NTSB officials including the Deputy Directors for the Offices of Aviation Safety, Research and Engineering, and Surface Transportation Safety. Within the offices of Aviation Safety and Research and Engineering, we interviewed various employees authorized to use access-to-aircraft privileges, including supervisory personnel.

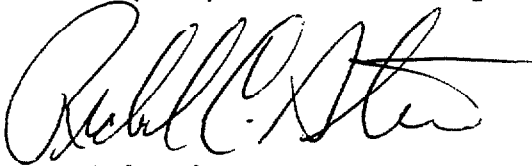
We conducted preliminary interviews with various FAA officials, including the managers of the following: Air Transportation Division, Flight Standards Service, Air Traffic Technical Training, Air Traffic System Effectiveness, and Air Traffic System Effectiveness Evaluations Division. We also interviewed the FAA Section Supervisor and several employees of the Evaluations Branch, Dulles Airport Washington Field Office.



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We will provide copies of this letter to the Secretary of Transportation; the Chairman, NTSB; the Administrator, FAA; and the Inspector General, Department of Transportation. We will also make copies available to other interested parties. Please contact me, or Houston Fuller of my staff, at (202) 512-6722 if you need additional information.



Richard C. Stiener  
Director





PROGRAM AUTHORITY FOR ACCESS TO AIRCRAFT

According to NTSB Order 52-A, dated February 27, 1987, the access-to-aircraft program has three objectives: (1) the enhancement of the individual's knowledge and experience with respect to particular types and models of aircraft, aircraft systems, and other matters pertaining to aircraft operations and related conditions and circumstances, (2) the opportunity to exchange information on matters of safety with air carrier operations personnel, and (3) the opportunity to observe the operation of the aircraft and acquire knowledge for a safety study, project, or investigation being carried out by the NTSB.

Part 223 of the Department of Transportation's Economic Regulations regarding "mandatory free transportation" states that every air carrier shall carry, without charge, safety inspectors of the NTSB or the FAA whose duty it is to inspect the aircraft, its equipment, route facilities, operational procedures, or airman competency. These inspectors must show credentials authorizing such transportation.

Part 121 of the Federal Aviation Regulations concerning "Admission to Flight Deck" states that "[n]o person may admit any person to the flight deck of an aircraft unless the person being admitted is . . . an FAA carrier inspector, or an authorized representative of the National Transportation Safety Board, who is performing official duties. . . ."

