

## Airline Safety

The attached article appeared in *The Sunday Capital* newspaper on November 6, 1994, following the crash of American Eagle Flight 4184 near Chicago. The article says that, according to the National Transportation Safety Board, "Regional carriers, with typical trips of about 200 miles, have more crashes than their long-haul cousins." The implication seems to be that flying with a regional carrier carries more risk than does flying with a long-haul carrier. Does the information given in the article support that hypothesis?

# Crash heightens fears of airline commuters

By MICHAEL CODY  
Staff Writer

Some BWI Airport passengers didn't like small airplanes even before 68 people were killed in a commuter plane crash last week near Chicago.

But they need to get where they're going. So, they keep climbing into the more than 100 small, turbo-prop commuter flights bound for Newport News, Va., Salisbury and other small cities each day.

"I don't like these little airplanes," said Shea Waters of Tampa, Fla., who flew to Hagerstown on Thursday with her husband and two small children.

During a stop at Baltimore-Washington International, she described their USAir Express de Havilland Dash-8 as "rickety, tiny and scary, with pop-up seats."

"That's what they are," joked Antinori Waters, her husband. "They're little lawn

chairs that are fastened to the floor."

Whenever an airplane crashes, many people think twice before flying. For the Waters and others who ride commuter planes, a crash only sharpens worries they already have.

Those concerns have some foundation. Regional carriers, with typical trips of about 200 miles, have more crashes than their long-haul cousins, according to the National Transportation Safety Board.

From 1989-93, regionals had 28 fatal crashes. National carriers, with nearly two-thirds more departures and trips averaging five times longer, had only 23 fatal crashes in the same period.

Yet the national carriers stand by their commuter lines.

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## Small-planes: A question of safety



Last week's crash that killed 68 people aboard an ATR-72 has sharpened concerns about the safety of smaller planes. More than 100 small, turbo-prop commuters take off daily from Baltimore-Washington International Airport. Here is a look at the fatal accident record of small planes in recent years.

	Regionals <sup>1</sup>	Nationals <sup>2</sup>
1993	5	1
1992	7	4
1991	9	4
1990	2	6
1989	5	8

1: Includes some large regional planes.

2: Includes "bush" flights in Alaska.

# PLANE

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"If major airlines didn't have confidence in the safety of their regional airline partners, they wouldn't be putting their passengers on them," said Chris Chiames, Air Transport Association spokesman.

And they are certainly are doing that. Regional airlines flew 52.7 million passengers on 4.6 million departures last year, up from 21.8 million passengers on 2.9 million departures a decade ago.

"Many communities either don't have airports that can handle jet traffic or, more likely, there aren't enough travelers to warrant more than one or two jet flights" daily, USAir spokesman Richard Weintraub said.

Turbo-prop planes are filling the gap.

"Their size is closer to the number of people who might want to get on, and the end result is you have several flights a day to a larger airport," Mr. Weintraub said.

The biggest regional carrier at BWI is USAir Express, which has 90 flights daily. It is joined by American Airlines' American Eagle, Business Express and Trans World Express.

Of 791 airports in the United States, 563 — 71 percent — receive air service exclusively from regional airlines.

Of Maryland's four major airports, only BWI has national jet service. Cumberland, Hagerstown and Salisbury are served only by regional carriers.

Regional airline spokesmen point out that crash statistics for their services cannot readily be compared to those for long-haul carriers.

Their crash figures include Alaska, where small "bush planes" sometimes are the only way to get around, and where a third to a half of commuter crashes occur.

Statistics for large regional-owned craft are also intermingled in some long-haul reports.

And while minimum maintenance standards for regional airlines are less stringent than those for long-haul carriers, the airlines often go beyond minimum requirements.

"This airline and others don't look at minimums as the maximum," said Paul Turk, USAir Express spokesman. "That's a starting place. You have to do that, then you do something beyond."

USAir Express flies Dash-8s. American Eagle, Business Express and Trans World Express fly similarly sized

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— Chris Chiames

Shorts, Saabs and ATR-42s. Each seats 30 to 40 passengers.

It was an American Eagle ATR-72, a slightly larger version of the ATR-42, that crashed in a soybean field Monday between Indianapolis and Chicago.

It was one of 173 European-made ATRs in service in the United States. ATR-42s have been flying in this country for about 10 years, and 43 ATR-72s have been sold since they were introduced here five years ago.

"When you have an airplane that has flown for five years and you have a first accident, it's always a very sorry thing. You have to investigate why, and find out the reasons," said Alain Brodin, president of Virginia-based ATR Marketing, the North American sales arm for the French-Italian venture.

"But do you know an airplane that

hasn't been in an accident?"

American Eagle also is satisfied with the plane's performance.

"The ATR, in fact, is probably the most sophisticated, state-of-the-art, commuter aircraft in the world today," said Patrick Henry, airline spokesman.

David Cook of Ellicott City, who left the airline six years ago to start his own freight firm, said he would have boarded another American Eagle ATR-72 immediately after the Indiana crash.

"I'd get on it with complete confidence. They're perfectly safe," he said.

Lots of others in the industry are convinced that flying is the safest way to travel. When Trans World Airlines, owner of Trans World Express at BWI, studied untimely deaths among its employees, it found the majority died in auto crashes.

Still, to plenty of passengers, safety is more than studies, statistics and maintenance. All they see is a short walk on the tarmac to a pint-sized plane.

"I didn't realize it was going to be this small (and) I was a little bit frightened," said Dr. Leonara de Castro, who boarded a Dash-8s for a trip from Newburgh, N.Y., to BWI last week.

"But sometimes I have a tendency to be fatalistic and say 'If it's my time, my time will come.'"

### The final minutes of Flight 4184

American Eagle Flight 4184 was approaching Chicago en route from Indianapolis.

- As the plane descended from 10,000 feet, it was moving too fast to have its flaps extended.
- At 9,400 feet, the plane was flying at 213 mph. The flaps began to retract and the ailerons moved rapidly, making the plane's right wing dip.
- The pilots attempted to recover, but the airplane rolled sharply to the right again.
- The airplane then rolled over on its back and plummeted to the ground.

The ailerons bank the wings and make the aircraft turn. They are one of the four controls that steer and level the plane.

Labels in diagram: Chicago O'Hare International Airport, Chicago, Lake Michigan, Chicago Heights, ILLINOIS, INDIANA, Merrillville, Lowell, Roselawn, Crash site, Inboard aileron, Outboard aileron, Inboard flap, Outboard flap, Spoilers.