

Complacency and the Qantas A330 Accident of 7 October 2008

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Oct 21, 2008 - Aviation safety expert Dr. Todd Curtis investigated the lack of interest by the US media in this Qantas accident and theorizes that the lack of interest is because the US industry is in the middle of a record-breaking period without fatal crashes.

The accident earlier this month involving a Qantas Airbus A330 on a flight from Singapore to Perth seriously injured several passengers, but didn't result in any fatalities. While the event drew substantial news media attention in Australia and Asia, there was very little mention of it by major US media. According to aviation safety expert Dr. Todd Curtis, this was very likely another example of how when it comes to airline events, it's difficult to get the attention of the US public, or of the policy makers in the US, if no one is killed.

Dr. Curtis believes that there would have been more media attention in the US if there had been at least one recent fatal event involving a US airline. While researching recent fatal US events, he found that the most recent passenger fatality on a US airliner was in August 2006. Looking back further, he found that the US airline industry had quietly passed a milestone. The 26-month period between the last fatal US event and late October 2008 has been the longest period without a passenger fatality on a US airliner since airlines in the US first began using jet aircraft in 1958.

It turns out that there was a similar accident-free period between 2003 and 2004. In May 2004 National Public Radio interviewed Dr. Curtis and other aviation safety experts about the role that accidents played in aviation safety policy. A period of that there's a certain amount of public complacency about airline safety when there are no major accidents. At the time of the interview, it had been 17 months since the previous fatal US accident.

Five months after the 2004 interview, a regional airliner crashed in Missouri, killing both crew members and 11 of the 13 passengers, bringing to an end a 21-month period with no US passenger fatalities. Currently, the US airline industry has gone 26 months without a passenger fatality. Dr. Curtis believes that this current fatality-free period is a sign that in spite of all the

problems faced the industry, that the risk faced by passengers continues to decline.

He also stated that although this record is a positive sign for the industry, the recent Qantas event demonstrated that no airline, even one with no passenger fatalities in its history, is immune from accidents.

More information about the Qantas accident investigation, and any future podcasts about the event from Dr. Curtis, will be available from AirSafe.com at qantas.airsafe.org.

About AirSafe.com:

AirSafe.com is a comprehensive resource for understanding aviation safety and security issues and created to provide both the traveling public and aviation safety and security professionals with both objective and timely information on aviation safety and security, especially events involving airline passenger fatalities. Since 1996, AirSafe.com has been an innovator in making critical risk assessment and risk management information to the public, enabling both airline passengers and aviation professionals to make accurate judgments about the risks of flying. Whether it is through its web sites, audio podcasts, online discussions, or published research, AirSafe.com continues to be at the forefront of getting useful aviation safety and security information to the aerospace industry and to the general public.

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