



INFORMATION PAPER

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION AND PREVENTION (AIG) DIVISIONAL MEETING (2008) Montréal, 13 to 18 October 2008

Agenda Item 1: Annex 13

1.4: Format of the Final Report in Annex 13

CONTRIBUTING FACTOR

(Presented by European Aviation Safety Agency)

SUMMARY

This information paper presents a view on the subject of the commonly used term “Contributing Factor”.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 AIG/08 Working Paper 8 reviews the use of the terms “cause” and “contributing factor”.

1.2 Subject 1.4: Format of the Final Report in Annex 13 Consideration of the need to replace the word “cause” with “contributing factors” in the format of the final report as contained in the Appendix to Annex 13.

1.3 In the context of ICAO Annex it is evident that there is a diversity of views on the correct definition and usage of the terms “cause” and “contributing factor”. This paper offers some considerations to facilitate discussion on the issue of common usage.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 It is often informative to look at the common usage of a term when considering a suitable definition. Phrases such as; weather is a strong **contributing factor** in many accidents are commonly used in reports. Other examples are:

- Call sign confusion continues to be a **contributing factor** in air traffic;
- one of the **contributing factors** to this event was the improper response;

- **contributing factor** in reducing the number of incursions;
- this lack of an adequate method of supervision has been a **contributing factor**;
- take an in depth look at the **contributing factors** to a maintenance error;
- incorrect phraseology was a **contributing factor**; and
- Human error is considered **contributing factor** in most aviation occurrences.

2.2 In factual analysis, cause is whatever is required to produce a result. An accident normally consists of a combination of factors, circumstances or conditions that must be present to produce the outcome.

2.3 A "factor" is a circumstance contributing to a result (accident or serious incident). Without this factor, the result would not exist but the factor alone is an element that, by itself, cannot produce the result. The term "contributing factor" is meaningless if this definition is accepted. A factor must be contributing if it is present otherwise it is not a factor.

2.4 Taking the positions stated in 2.2 and 2.3 it is reasonable to say that a typical accident may have a cause or causes that have associated a contributing factor or contributing factors. There will always be at least one a cause and at least one contributing factor.

2.5 A contributing factor such as human error can be a dominant element in an event. However it may not be necessary to discover all contributing factors to understand the cause or causes an accident.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 There are event factors of different types (contributing, circumstantial, conditional). This complicates the discussion concerning a definition for the commonly used term "contributing factor". Above 2.3 offers one view.

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