

FAA gives Cascade 'clean bill'

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By Frederick A. Johnsen
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Cascade Airways, which sustained four landing accidents since the first of the year, has improved its training program, and is conducting its operations to the satisfaction of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), a FAA spokesman told the Union-Bulletin.

"They're running a safe operation," according to Dale Backman, who headed a team of FAA appraisers who checked into all aspects of Cascade's operations following the first three landing accidents. No injuries, other than an ankle sprain, were reported in any of the incidents.

The investigation was ordered by the FAA in late April, following a belly landing Jan. 30 in Wenatchee in which the crew forgot to lower the landing gear of the Cascade Beech 99 plane it was flying; an incident five days later in which a Cascade plane without passengers hit a snowbank while making a landing at Pullman; and an April 6

belly landing in Spokane that resulted from landing gear that would not extend.

After the investigation was called, and after FAA officials had determined that no penalty action would be taken against the airline itself resulting from the incidents, a Cascade Beech 99 was damaged while landing at Walla Walla when the left landing gear partially collapsed. Backman said this August Walla Walla mishap has not altered the FAA's position toward the airline.

"We've given them (Cascade) essentially a clean bill of health at this time," Backman said.

He said Cascade has added "more professionalism" to its training program since the accidents.

The collision with the snow bank occurred on a revenue flight, although no passengers were aboard the plane at the time. Backman said Cascade has "made provision now for some separate training flights" rather than allowing training on revenue flights. The pilot on the ill-fated Pullman flight said he was practicing short field landing techniques at

Pullman, even though that runway does not require such techniques.

The Wenatchee accident, in which the landing gear was forgotten in the retracted position, was complicated by the fact that the crew earlier had silenced a warning horn that could have notified them of the retracted gear as they neared the runway. The horn was silenced, according to findings of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), because it was faulty, and sounded prematurely.

The NTSB further said the out-of-adjustment horn was noted in the plane's log four months before the accident, with no corrective action noted in the log.

Backman said the FAA appraisers have recommended better records-keeping procedures for Cascade to avoid such time lags in the future.

Backman said the April 6 belly landing in Spokane was not the fault of the Cascade crew, but rather was due to a component failure. A method of bypassing such a failure has been devised

since the Spokane incident, Backman said.

He said reasons for the apparent mechanical failure believed responsible for the August Walla Walla accident have not yet been determined.

He said parts shortages and mechanical problems are not unique to Cascade's Beech 99 commuter airliners. "Maybe there should be a better schedule of checking components" on all commuter airliners, because of the heavy use commuter operators put on their planes, he said.

Backman said Cascade has standardized on giving its pilots check rides every six months. He said pilot procedure manuals put out by the airline for its flight crews now go into greater detail than before the FAA investigation.

"The training program is really more than adequate now for their needs," Backman said.

"Now it remains to be seen how effective are the recommendations" made by the FAA appraisal team, he said.