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Smaller Airports Too Should Follow
FAA Emergency Regulations: Study

Smaller Airports Too Should Follow FAA Emergency Regulations: Study

- Report concludes that size and lack of resources should not exempt smaller airports from FAA emergency regulations
- Small and non-hub airports could form partnerships with private stakeholders to minimize cost
- Transportation Research Board suggests a parallel study on aviation security, developing statewide or regional standards for smaller airports and extra training for law enforcement on scene of incident

By Steff Thomas (mailto:stthomas_ic@bna.com)

July 18 — Small and non-hub airports should not be exempt from emergency preparedness regulations despite size and lack of resources, the Transportation Research Board reports (http://onlinepubs.trb.org/Onlinepubs/acrp/acrp_syn_072.pdf).

As part of the Board's Airport Cooperation Research Project, the study delved into preparedness exercises utilized by larger hub airports that could be emulated by airports currently exempt from Federal Aviation Administration regulations. A survey conducted as part of the study found that smaller airports did not object to the findings in the July 18 report and were willing to implement new preparation strategies.

"Government regulations provide a framework for certification but not the steps needed to reach beyond a minimum standard," the report said. "The airports represented in the case studies are willing to go beyond regulatory baselines to provide the highest level of customer service and safety and to see improved safety as a conduit to customer satisfaction."

Since 2009, large and medium hub airports serving certain air carriers have been required (http://www.faa.gov/airports/airport_safety/part139_cert/) by the FAA to complete regular emergency preparedness exercises to develop response techniques should an incident occur in the airport or nearby. Many of the emergency techniques practiced come from an exercise and evaluation program developed by the Department of Homeland Security.

Smaller airports could benefit from borrowing the same tools in order to save time and assist them in conducting preparedness exercises where there is lack of capacity for training and development of new techniques, the report said.

While the Homeland Security guidelines (http://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1914-25045-8890/hseep_apr13_.pdf) are extremely detailed and much harder to use by smaller airports with limited resources, the report said it would not be impossible.

Suggestions

The Research Board offered several suggestions for implementation of the full-scale and tabletop exercises included in the guidelines. The exercise types vary only in that full-scale exercises involve multiple agencies and real-time scenarios. Table-top exercises focus mainly on hypothetical and simulated emergencies, according to the report.

Developing partnerships between smaller airports and private stakeholders could minimize the cost of implementing new techniques and maximize the effectiveness of their emergency preparation plans, according to the report.

The study's conclusion gave three suggestions for further review including a parallel study on aviation security by the Transportation Security Administration, developing a potential state-wide or regional training plan for small and non-hub airports and training exercises for local law enforcement when on the scene of an incident.

More than 50 airports of all sizes were included in the study. The Board conducted case studies on six airports located in Denver; Boise, Idaho; Rochester, Minn.; Lakeland, Fla.; Miami and Owatonna, Minn.

Half of the airports that participated in the study were run by city departments, 42 percent by regional authorities, 8 percent by county departments, one by a joint board and one was a private airport.

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