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SUBJECT: Mail Transportation Pilot Dies in Crash of Cessna 207 (AK-95-04)

SUMMARY

On February 25, 1995, a commercial pilot transporting mail in a Cessna 207 died as a result of injuries sustained in an aircraft crash north of the Arctic Circle. The pilot was flying under Visual Flight Rules (VFR) to a bush community approximately 100 miles from the flight's point of origin. An air taxi operator, approximately 25 miles from Kotzebue, reported observing a column of black smoke. Search and Rescue personnel later discovered the wreckage on the south wall of a box canyon.

INTRODUCTION

It was not possible to physically visit the incident site because of its inaccessibility. Records and media reports were reviewed to evaluate possible risk factors related to this incident.

The pilot was flying for a local air transportation service, and was a certified commercial pilot. He was the only person on board the aircraft. Weather conditions at the time of the incident were as follows:

Sky condition:	clear
Ceiling:	none
Precipitation:	none
Temperature:	-22F
Visibility:	35 Statute Miles

INVESTIGATION

A 25 year old, male pilot was killed when his aircraft, a Cessna 207, impacted the ground on a mail transportation flight to a bush community. The crashed occurred at approximately 1250, about 15 minutes after take-off. At ten minutes into the

flight the pilot reported by radio to an inbound pilot, that he was looking for wolves. Five minutes later, an attempt to re-establish communications by the inbound company pilot was unsuccessful. An air taxi pilot in the vicinity reported observing a vertical column of smoke, and investigated the source. The pilot then reported the wreckage of an aircraft. Later, SAR personnel found the crash and identified it as the missing Cessna 207. The crash was located on the wall of a box canyon, approximately 100 feet from the top of the canyon. Although the crash was unobserved, details of the investigation reveal possible recommendations that may prevent the occurrence of similar incidents in the future.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The pilot died from injuries sustained in an aircraft crash.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1: Pilots should maintain established safe routes and altitudes unless required to deviate for reasons of safety.

Discussion: The crash site was found at the 100 foot level of a box canyon. Normal altitude for the flight plan filed was 2,500 feet. The aircraft was also found in a position that significantly deviated from the company's normal coastline route. He was flying inland instead of the usual route. Weather conditions were for VFR, and no adverse weather had been reported by the victim or other pilots in the vicinity. Thus, it appears that the deviation from the established flight plan was not necessary for safer flying.

Recommendation #2: Observation by pilots of wildlife is a potentially hazardous activity and should be avoided at low altitudes.

Discussion: The victim reported to another pilot that he was looking for wolves. This was not an established part of his flight plan. At low altitudes divided attention can result in a limited ability to make rapid, effective flight maneuvers. An aircraft flying at 150 miles per hour is moving at a rate of 220 feet per second. Hazards at a distance of 500 feet can be impacted in 2.3 seconds at this speed. Previous data from Alaska indicates that the crash potential for commercial pilots engaged in game spotting, wildlife enumeration, or guiding is significant.