

**NTSB**

National  
Transportation  
Safety Board

# The NTSB's Family Assistance Program

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# Agency Mission

Making transportation safer by conducting independent accident investigations, advocating safety improvements, and deciding pilots' and mariners' certification appeals.



INTEGRITY  
TRANSPARENCY  
INDEPENDENCE  
EXCELLENCE  
DIVERSITY &  
INCLUSION

# Legislative Mandate

- Maintain congressionally mandated independence and objectivity;
- Conduct objective, precise accident investigations and safety studies;
- Perform fair and objective airman and mariner certification appeals;
- Advocating and promoting safety recommendations;
- Assist victims of transportation accidents and their families.**



# Investigative Responsibilities

- All U.S. civil aviation and commercial space accidents
  - Accredited representative for foreign aviation accidents
- Selected surface mode accidents
  - Rail
  - Highway
  - Marine
  - Pipeline
  - Hazmat



# U.S. Federal Transportation Accident Family Assistance Legislation

## Aviation Disaster Family Assistance Act (1996 & 1997)

- 49 USC § 1136: NTSB & the Designated Organization
- 49 USC § 41113: U.S. Air Carriers
- 49 USC § 41313: Foreign Air Carriers

## Rail Passenger Disaster Family Assistance Act (2008)

- 49 USC § 1139: NTSB & the Designated Organization
- 49 USC § 24316: Rail Passenger Carriers

## Any NTSB Investigation (2018)

- 49 USC § 1140: Info for Families of Individuals Involved in Accidents



# NTSB Family Assistance Responsibilities

For all accidents investigated by the NTSB to the maximum extent practicable:

- Inform family members regarding roles and investigative activities
- Brief families of findings prior to any public briefing (media)
- Inform of any NTSB public hearings/meetings

For air carrier and passenger rail accidents:

- Facilitate victim recovery and identification
- Designate Organization for Mental Health / Family Care
- Coordination with government agencies and operator
- Monitor for attorney solicitations

# Why is the NTSB the Lead Coordinating Agency?

Lead government agency responsible for conducting accident investigation

Direct source of investigative information

Trust and confidence fostered through transparency

*“Family members need to hear the facts from the NTSB. No one else will do, because the NTSB is in charge of the accident investigation and the accident site...the family members need to hear from us first.”*

Jim Hall, NTSB Chairman  
Testimony before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Aviation  
June 19, 1996

# How does the NTSB define “family member”?

Federal Family Assistance Legislation does not provide a definition of family member.

- Immediate or extended family
- Loved ones
- Friends
- Colleagues
- Survivors (self)

Family member vs. legal next of kin

- Medicolegal significance
- Personal effects
- Legal proceedings





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Victim Services/  
Disaster Mental Health



Government/Industry  
Emergency  
Management



Medicolegal  
Operations



Hospitals/Healthcare

# Developing a Family Assistance Program

Determine the types of accidents and operators for which the program will apply.

Determine the types of assistance to be provided.

Identify the other organizations involved in the family assistance response.

Draft, review, and implement a flexible and scalable response plan.

Audit, evaluate, exercise, and enhance the plan.

# Collaboration is Critical

*“Nothing will be accomplished unless government, industry, and helping services such as the American Red Cross work together.”*

*Jim Hall, NTSB Chairman  
Testimony before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Aviation  
June 19, 1996*

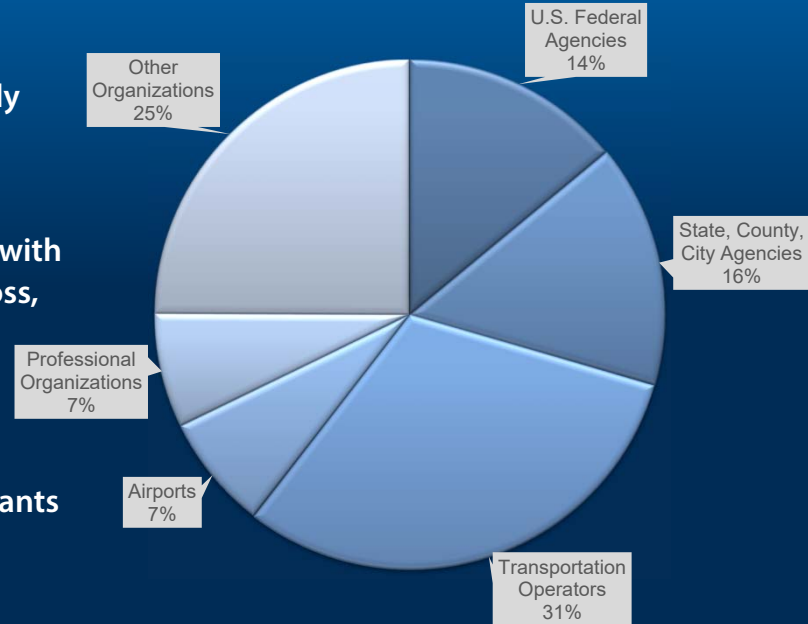
# Outreach Program

Continual focus on collaborating with the family assistance response community

Identifying and nurturing critical partnerships with federal, state, local agencies, American Red Cross, transportation operators, airports, etc.

## 2022 NTSB Outreach Efforts:

- 72 outreach events with ~4,453 participants
- Coordination with 356 family assistance response agencies/organizations
- ~25 collaborations per week



# Family Member Engagement: Lessons Learned

Focus on fundamental concerns of families within the boundaries of the investigative process and organization's mandate and capabilities.

Establish and communicate realistic expectations.

Family Assistance  
vs.  
Family Advocacy

Build rapport and credibility through honest interactions.

Make family assistance an organizational priority engrained in culture – a mindset.

*"We are humans before we are investigators."*

# Parting thoughts...

Listening matters – focus on what survivors/family members are asking

Words matter – think about what you say

Actions matter – think about what you do

Empathy matters – think about how you would want your loved ones treated

*"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."*

*Maya Angelou, American author and civil rights activist*



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