

NTSB Guidance for Passenger List/Manifest Distribution & Control

The National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) understanding of passenger list/manifest distribution and control has changed to reflect the current emergency management approaches for mass casualty incident (MCI) response. Previous NTSB guidance focused largely on all-fatal accidents (i.e. no surviving passengers or crew), where the presiding medical examiner or coroner is principally responsible for victim accounting.

Mass casualty incidents pose a different set of victim accounting challenges due to the rapid movement of survivors away from the scene. Determining the whereabouts and welfare of those involved in an MCI is the responsibility of the jurisdiction in which an accident has occurred. This process requires collaboration between public safety agencies and the air carrier, who holds critical information related to the persons onboard the aircraft.

Therefore, it is important for air carriers to develop an understanding of the mass casualty response and identify the agency(ies) that will be coordinating the victim accounting operation; develop a process to consider requests for the passenger list/manifest; and provide relevant information (i.e. number of persons onboard, names of passengers and crew, contact information for survivors and family members), to appropriate agencies. This document offers guidance for air carriers and the response community regarding both the distribution of the passenger list/manifest and the importance of maintaining control of the information contained on the passenger list/manifest. This guidance does not obligate air carriers to provide the passenger list/manifest to any agency or organization beyond what is required by relevant federal, state, or local statute.

What does the family assistance legislation specifically state regarding passenger list/manifest distribution?

The family assistance legislation specifies that the NTSB and the designated organization, which is the American Red Cross (ARC), shall receive the passenger list from the air carrier involved in the accident upon request.¹ The NTSB and ARC are restricted from sharing the information other than with the family of a passenger, if deemed appropriate.²

Which agencies, beyond those specified in federal legislation, might request information from the passenger list/manifest?

The jurisdiction where the accident occurred is responsible for accounting for all fatal and non-fatal victims of the MCI. This responsibility requires collaboration between the air carrier and the presiding public safety agencies – emergency management agency, fire department, emergency medical services, law enforcement, the medical examiner/coroner, public health authorities and hospitals that have received patients. Air carriers are essential in this accounting process. They hold critical information – the passenger list/manifest- that serves as the foundation for the victim accounting process. The NTSB encourages air carriers to develop a process to consider requests for the passenger list/manifest and a mechanism to provide information from the passenger list/manifest to a local or state coordinating agency established by the presiding jurisdiction responsible for investigating missing persons, such as the emergency management agency or lead law enforcement agency located within an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) . Air carriers should refer other local agencies to this coordinating agency for information contained on the passenger list/manifest. Air carriers should provide the NTSB with the names and agency affiliations of the agencies with which they shared information from the passenger list/manifest, what information was included, and the date and time the information was shared, as soon as possible after dissemination.

What information is included on the passenger list/manifest?

Carriers are obligated to provide the NTSB and ARC “a list (which is based on the best available information at the time of the request) of the names of the passengers aboard the aircraft (whether or not such names have been verified) and will periodically update the list.”³ The term “passenger” is broadly defined to include everyone aboard the aircraft (crew, revenue, and non-revenue passengers).⁴ Family assistance legislation does not provide additional detail regarding the contents of the passenger list/manifest.

As part of the family assistance operation, the NTSB will request additional information from the carrier, specifically contact information for accident survivors and family members. The NTSB will use this information

¹ 49 USC §1136(d), 49 USC §41113(b)(4), and 49 USC §41313(c)(4)

² 49 USC §1136(d)(2)

³ 49 USC §41113(b)(4); a similar requirement appears in 49 USC §41313(c)(4)

⁴ 49 USC §1136(h)(2)

to develop a contact list for communicating with survivors and family members during the family assistance operation and throughout the investigation. The NTSB expects the air carrier to share contact information expediently, but also understands that it may take time to obtain and confirm contact information for accident survivors and family members.

Additional considerations for air carriers:

- This guidance does not preclude NTSB investigative requests under Title 49 Code of Federal Regulations Part 831 for manifest-related information including, the close-out/load manifest, interim documents, final passenger list/manifest, and procedures to account for people onboard the airplane.
- Engage early with the public safety agencies involved in the victim accounting process. The NTSB Transportation Disaster Assistance Division (TDA) will support air carrier efforts to integrate into this process.
- Develop procedures to consider requests and determine if appropriate information from the passenger list/manifest should be provided to the requesting agency. It is reasonable that once the air carrier shares information from the passenger list/manifest with the coordinating agency, all other requests be redirected to that coordinating agency.
- Ensure that corporate and local (i.e. station) emergency response plans include procedures to vet requests from the response community for the passenger list/manifest and that air carrier personnel at the corporate and local levels are adequately trained to implement these procedures.
- Participate in MCI response planning efforts within geographic areas of operation to develop an understanding of the overarching response and the victim accounting process. Identify key points of contact within the response community who will serve in a leadership role during an MCI victim accounting operation and who will likely request information from the passenger list/manifest.

Considerations for the response community (i.e. local/state agencies, airports, and hospitals) directly involved in victim accounting:

- Identify a coordinating agency for the victim accounting operation that will request information from the passenger list/manifest from the air carrier. All additional local and state requests for the passenger list/manifest should be directed to that agency, which should document the name, agency affiliation and date/time the information was shared. Information needs vary depending on the phase of the operation. For example, during the immediate life safety phase, the most critical information needed by fire/EMS assets responding to the scene are the number of persons onboard the aircraft. Once accident survivors have been cleared from the scene, agencies responsible for victim accounting will require names and, ideally, contact information. It is important for requesting agencies to clearly articulate the specific information needed and their role in the response at the time of the request.
- Understand that the information contained on a passenger list/manifest is sensitive because family members of those onboard the aircraft may not be aware of their loved-one's involvement in the accident. While the air carrier is responsible for notifying families of persons onboard that their loved-one is involved in the accident, the process takes time.
- Establish appropriate document control measures and ensure safeguards are in place to prevent public disclosure of the information contained on the passenger list/manifest. This information should not be released outside of agencies that have a direct operational role in the victim accounting process (i.e. public safety agencies).
- Be prepared to address questions from the air carrier regarding the role of the requesting agency in the victim accounting process, use of the data, and mechanisms to ensure that the information is not publicly disclosed.
- Share information about the whereabouts and welfare of victims with the air carrier, ARC, and the NTSB as part of the victim accounting process. The air carrier, NTSB and ARC are mandated by federal legislation to offer services and information to accident victims and their family members.

Air carriers are encouraged to contact the NTSB TDA (202-314-6290; assistance@ntsb.gov) during the preparedness phase to discuss the guidance offered in this document, and during the response phase to discuss requests for the passenger list/manifest if the carrier is unsure about the role of the requesting agency in the response.

This document supplants other guidance provided by the NTSB regarding distribution of the manifest.