

## Flight Recorder Sheds No Light on Armenia A-320 Crash

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Examination of the flight recorder from an Armenian airliner that crashed into the Black Sea last month has produced no new information on the reasons for the crash, an official said on June 19. The A-320 Airbus, operated by the Armenia Airline, came down in **stormy weather** off Russia's Black Sea coast on May 3, with the loss of all 113 passengers and crew on board.

"The interstate aviation committee has finished decoding the flight data recorder," said Gayane Davtyan, spokeswoman for Armenia's main civil aviation department. "The decoding ... showed that **the plane had not disintegrated** in the air," Davtyan said. "The engines were operating until the plane hit the water." She said the flight recorders had held information about eight flights made by the plane during April 30-May 3, including the fatal trip. The tape lasted 26 hours 20 minutes, including 1 hour 26 minutes of the last flight. Russia's Transportation Ministry said in a statement earlier that the plane had enough fuel to complete the flight safely, and that **the autopilot was off in the last minute**. Davtyan also said the commission had started detailed analysis of recorders and planned to model the crash on a special A-320 training plane. "The conclusion about the reasons will be made after the analysis and investigation, to be followed by flight safety recommendations," she said.

On June 8, the commission finished deciphering the other black box-the cockpit voice recorder. The recorder had captured **33 minutes of exchanges between the pilot of the plane and air traffic controllers** at Russia's southern Adler airport, outside the popular resort of Sochi, where the plane was heading. The Russian Transportation Ministry said the **transcript would not be published** in line with the standards and practices of the International Civil Aviation Organization.

## FAA Sets Landing Safety Margin, But Carriers Must Set Procedures

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Although the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is requiring all turbojet operators to land with a **15 percent safety margin** by Sept. 1, it will still partly be up to operators to determine when an additional landing safety assessment is needed. The extra **15 percent margin applies to the additional runway length needed beyond the actual landing distance required** by the aircraft type, also in accordance with its **weight, capabilities and deceleration systems**. The margin also must be based on exact runway conditions, as well as meteorological and other factors expected at time of arrival.

Existing FAA regulations simply state that operators must abort or curtail their operations when conditions are "hazardous," and only under these circumstances must there be a before-takeoff determination of landing distance using the 15 percent safety margin.

As FAA puts it: "Although an airplane can be legally dispatched under these conditions, compliance with these requirements alone does not ensure that the airplane can land safely within the distance available on the runway. Runway actually used for landing will be different, particularly if the runway, runway surface condition, meteorological conditions, airplane configuration, airplane weight, or use of airplane ground deceleration devices is different than that used in the preflight calculation."

However, FAA adds that this assessment doesn't necessarily translate into a specific calculation before every landing. "In many cases, the before-takeoff criteria, with their large safety margins, **will be adequate to ensure that there is sufficient landing distance with at least a 15 percent safety margin at the time of arrival,**" the agency states.