AVIATION NEWS BITS

CPA INVITES US AIR FORCE FOR FIREFIGHTING TRAINING

SAIPAN, The Marianas —The Commonwealth Ports Authority is inviting the U.S. Air Force Fire Protection for a training exercise on Saipan.

Saipan hosts the Pacific Region Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting Training Center, which is adjacent to the international airport.

"We would like to open up our training to the U.S. Air Force Fire Protection within the Pacific region. We hope we can be of assistance and also be part of U.S. Air Force's excellent training program," said the CPA in a July 5 letter to David Donan, Command Fire Chief, Pacific Air Command Armed Forces.

"We believe our training center and the types of training offered would be able to assist your fire personnel training as realistically as possible," said the CPA.

Saipan's ARFF facility is the newest firefighting training center in the Western Pacific. It provides training services to fire service personnel from Guam, Palau, Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia.

Since its inception about three years ago, CPA has trained some 150 personnel a year.

The Pacific Region ARFF Training Center was fully funded by the Federal Aviation Administration with three grants totaling $5 million.

This project includes a classroom with a capacity of 30 to 40 firefighters to teach related courses and an aircraft mock-up facility for hands-on training using live-fire scenario. The FAA requires this training at least once a year for all airport firefighters.
(Story by Liberty Dones, Reporter Friday, July 28, 2006)

FEDERAL AGENCIES DISAGREE OVER NEED TO ELIMINATE VAPORS FROM ALL AIRLINER FUEL TANKS

UNITED STATES - 'Look at that crazy fuel flow indicator there on No. 4. See that?" exclaimed Capt. Ralph Kevorkian. Sitting in the pilot's seat on TWA Flight 800, a B747, Kevorkian was remarking to fellow crew members about a spike in the fuel flow reading in the No. 4 engine as the airplane passed through 13,000 feet after takeoff on July 17, 1996, from JFK International Airport for an overnight flight to Paris.

It wasn't a surge in fuel use, but a false reading caused by a surge in electricity.

Less than two minutes later the plane blew up, killing all 230 passengers and crew members. The National Transportation Safety Board concluded that flammable vapors in the center fuel tank under the passenger deck exploded, tearing the airplane apart. Electrical arcing in a wire bundle outside the tank, which contained the circuit for the No.4 engine fuel flow, caused a power surge that jumped from wire to wire and ultimately to the wires connecting the fuel-quantity indicators in the center tank.

The electric current traveled down these normally harmless wires into the tank and ignited the vapors. All the vapors needed was an ignition source - a match, as it were - to trigger an explosion. What Kevorkian saw on the fuel gauge was a spurious reading portending imminent doom.

Now, 10 years after the crash, the National Transportation Safety Board is mightily frustrated with the lack of progress in efforts to improve fuel tank safety. "The most prominent issues raised by the TWA 800 accident concern protection against flammable fuel tank vapors and aging electrical systems," the NTSB told the Federal Aviation Administration earlier this year.
What has the FAA done to address those issues in the years since the Flight 800 tragedy?

There have been endless and earnest meetings, and various directives have been issued seeking to prevent ignition sources in fuel tanks. But the FAA has only issued a proposed requirement to prevent fuel-tank explosions through an "inerting" process that fills voids in the tanks with nitrogen-enriched air. It also has left airline manufacturers to their own devices by only proposing - not yet requiring - inspections of aircraft wiring.

On its new B787, Boeing is installing an inerting system for both the center section and the wing fuel tanks. European manufacturer Airbus has designed the A380 double-decker without a center wing tank and claims it has eliminated all potential sources of ignition from its wing tanks so the weight and complexity of an inerting system is not necessary.

Thus, we come to one of the problems the FAA has created for itself. The agency has suggested that inerting systems are needed only for center tanks with nearby heat sources (such as air-conditioning packs, which warmed the fuel vapors on TWA 800). But the NTSB has recommended that flammable vapors be eliminated from all tanks.