



Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality of Information Disseminated by the National Transportation Safety Board

I. Background

As directed by Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Public Law 106-554; H.R. 5658), OMB issued government-wide guidelines that provide policy and procedural guidance to Federal agencies for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information disseminated by Federal agencies (67 FR 8452, February 22, 2002). Congress enacted this legislation as a result of concerns that information disseminated by agencies through Web sites and other mediums are not always of high quality. Each Federal agency is now required to issue guidelines that ensure the quality of information that it disseminates. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has developed the following guidelines to ensure the quality of its information products; the document is available on the Web site at <<http://www.nts.gov/Info/info.htm>>. Comments or questions concerning this document may be directed to National Transportation Safety Board, Attention: Records Officer, RE-51, 490 L'Enfant Plaza, SW, Washington, DC 20594.

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant accidents in the other modes of transportation - railroad, highway, marine and pipeline - and issuing safety recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents.

The NTSB is responsible for maintaining the government's database on civil aviation accidents and also conducts special studies of transportation safety issues of national significance. The NTSB provides investigators to serve as U.S. Accredited Representatives as specified in international treaties for aviation accidents overseas involving U.S.-registered aircraft, or involving aircraft or major components of U.S. manufacture.

The NTSB also serves as the "court of appeals" for any airman, mechanic or mariner whenever the Federal Aviation Administration or the U.S. Coast Guard Commandant takes certain certificate action, or when the FAA assesses civil penalties.

II. Definitions

Quality - information should incorporate utility, objectivity, accuracy, and integrity.

- Utility - information should be useful for its intended audience.
- Objectivity - information products should be unbiased.
- Accuracy - factual information must be accurate, clear, concise, and complete.
- Integrity - information released to the public should be secure from tampering, modification, or destruction.

III. Coverage

The NTSB disseminates the following information products:

- Accident Reports and Briefs
- Annual Review of Aircraft Accident Data
- Special Investigation Reports
- Safety Studies
- Annual Reports to Congress
- Initial Decisions of the Administrative Law Judges

- Opinions and Orders
- Public Records and Files, including Accident Dockets
- Safety Recommendation Letters
- Special Pamphlets and Brochures

The primary purpose of Safety Board information products is to promote safety improvements in the operations or oversight of public and private organizations, resulting in a safer transportation system in the United States.

The primary audience of Safety Board products is persons, groups, or organizations that can bring about changes in transportation safety through action on the Board's safety recommendations. The Congress, industry, media, and public, who can influence the actions of the recommendation recipients, are also important audiences. The type of audience and the technical knowledge of the audience vary greatly, depending on the document's subject and the safety issues presented. The Safety Board does not intend its reports and recommendations to be read only by technicians and specialists in the transportation industry.

Information quality standards as described by OMB's final guidelines are incorporated by reference as NTSB policies and standards. Except for those categories of information that are specifically exempted from coverage, products originating from and disseminated by NTSB as public information on or after October 1, 2002 should meet the guidelines set forth, regardless of when the information was first disseminated.

Limitations and Exclusions

The Safety Board issues or makes available the following public information, not covered by these guidelines. These items are excluded either because they refer to information otherwise represented as products which are covered by guidelines, or because they are primarily intended for inter- or intra-agency use.

- Press Releases
- Speeches & Testimony of the Board Members and Staff
- Aviation Accident Data
- NTSB Directives
- Regulations of the NTSB
- Financial and other administrative information

Preliminary reports issued by the NTSB are not covered under these guidelines. They are noted as subject to change, and that they may contain errors, which will be corrected when the final report has been completed.

Other information that may be publicly disseminated but covered under separate safeguard is excluded from these guidelines. Initial decisions or opinions and orders have established procedures in place to provide an opportunity to contest decisions. Records subject to the Privacy Act are also excluded from these quality guidelines.

Dissemination does not include distribution limited to agency contractors or grantees unless the agency represents the information as, or uses the information in support of, an official agency position, or the grantee is disseminating the agency's information at the request of the agency, or the grant requires agency approval of the information request.

Information publicly disseminated by the NTSB but not originating from or commissioned by the agency is not subject to these guidelines. The NTSB maintains and issues documents from other sources as part of its accident investigation dockets. The assurance for the quality of these documents is limited to maintaining them as they were provided to and used by the investigative staff. Correction to the content of these documents is the sole responsibility of the authoring individual or organization.

Information not intended for public dissemination is also excluded from these quality guidelines, and may include Official Use Only documents, administrative items, and other documents shared within the agency, across other government agencies, and with parties to an investigation.

IV. Quality Assurance Measures

Pre-dissemination Review Process

The Safety Board strives to ensure that all information conforms to the highest quality standards. To ensure accuracy, objectivity, and integrity, NTSB products may undergo technical, supervisory, editorial, and legal review. Depending on the nature of the product, the process may range from a formal review and adoption by the Board to a less formal review that involves peer review and Office oversight.

Products that are adopted by the Board are first prepared and reviewed during an extensive process involving technical experts, parties to the investigation, editors, and Office Directors before they are considered by the Board Members. Final products are discussed by the Board Members in an open forum, as prescribed by the "Government in the Sunshine Act", 5 USC §552b, before they are adopted.

Other public information items, including products that are not adopted by the Board, also go through an extensive pre-dissemination review. Staff and management have distinct responsibilities for verifying, approving, and releasing the content. The responsibilities include checks for accuracy, completeness, appropriateness, privacy, and consistency.

Methodology Disclosure

To promote objectivity and accuracy, findings of laboratory and research activities will conform to widely accepted practices in the U.S., and will include, where practicable, a description of the methods, data sources, analytical techniques, measures, assumptions, and limitations of the activities.

Information Integrity and Security

The NTSB assures the integrity of its data collection processes and information holdings using programs and policies designed to secure resources according to the Computer Security Act, the Government Information Security Reform Act, and other applicable laws, regulations, and guidance. Hardcopy of official documents is issued, upon request, using a Certificate of True Copy, which is signed and sealed by the Records Officer. The Board is currently evaluating ways of issuing documents electronically using advanced authentication methodologies such as Public Key Infrastructure and digital signatures.

V. Administrative Mechanism to Correct Disseminated Information

The NTSB has established procedures to request correction or revision to information covered by these guidelines based on its own discovery or by request or petition from the public. Anyone believing that information disseminated by NTSB does not adhere to the quality guidelines should make a specific request for correction or reconsideration in writing to:

National Transportation Safety Board
Attn: Executive Secretariat/Information Quality
490 L'Enfant Plaza, SW
Washington, DC 20594

The request for corrective action should include:

1. Requestor's name, telephone number, address and/or e-mail address.
2. Description and documentation as to how information is to be corrected, revised, or reviewed.
3. Explanation of how person submitting the request is affected by any information error.
4. Explanation of how the disseminated information failed the quality standards.
5. Any pertinent attachments.

Petitions for Reconsideration of the Board's findings and determination of probable cause are handled according to 49 *Code of Federal Regulations* [CFR] Parts 831 and 845.

Other requests for correction or revision are routed to the appropriate Office for review and response within 60 days. If the request requires more than 60 calendar days to resolve, the agency will inform the complainant that

more time is required, indicating the reason why and an estimated decision date.

NTSB will hold the Office originating the information product accountable for complying with information quality assurance guidelines and for supplying any corrections. If the agency determines that it will correct the challenged information, it will issue corrections via errata sheets, addenda, replacement, re-issued report, or other method, depending on the nature of the product as well as the useful purpose and urgency of the correction. Further, the agency will notify the complainant either of an issued correction, or of the intent to correct and the proposed associated action.

Appeals for a denial of request for correction must be filed in writing within 30 days of receipt of notification of the denial to:

National Transportation Safety Board
Attn: Office of Managing Director
490 L'Enfant Plaza, SW
Washington, DC 20594.

The agency will respond to all requests for appeals within 60 calendar days of receipt. If the request requires more than 60 calendar days to resolve, the agency will inform the complainant that more time is required, indicating the reason why and an estimated decision date. Whenever possible, requests for appeals shall not be assigned to the originator of the information (e.g., chief report writer or investigator), although that person should be consulted for an evaluation of the petition.

VI. Compliance and Reporting Responsibilities

The Director of Research and Engineering will be responsible for Agency's compliance to these guidelines. The Agency must submit annually each fiscal year a report to the Director of OMB a list of appeals received by NTSB and the nature of the complaints. The first report will start on January 1, 2004.

Last updated: 29 September 2002

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