

Fuel line assembly cited in jet fire

Vital mechanism wasn't connected, federal investigators find

By Ken Kaye Staff writer



The National Transportation Safety Board says a fuel line component was disconnected before a Dynamic jetliner caught fire last week. AP Photo

Federal investigators have discovered a critical fuel line mechanism was disconnected on the Dynamic International Airways jetliner that caught fire Thursday at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport.

In its accident update released Tuesday, the National Transportation Safety Board also said the twin-engine Boeing 767 had been in dry storage for almost two and half years until Dynamic started leasing it in September.

The jet was then flown about 240 hours before it erupted into flames on Thursday, investigator Tim LeBaron said. Both those factors hint that maintenance problems likely played a role.

Dynamic International Airways Flight 405 was supposed to fly to Caracas, Venezuela. As the jetliner was taxiing for takeoff, a plane behind it noticed fuel leaking from the left wing. Fire broke out shortly after, prompting passengers to flee from the aircraft on emergency chutes.

“Of the 90 passengers and 11 crew-members onboard the airplane, one was seriously injured and 21 sustained minor injuries as a result of the emergency evacuation,” LeBaron wrote in the update.

Other details in the NTSB update:

- An initial review of the plane’s onboard logbook showed no maintenance had been performed — before the accident — on the wing area where the “fuel line coupling assembly” was found disconnected. That assembly, located just above the engine, has been retained for further examination. There was no evidence the left engine exploded and caused the fire.
- The fire didn’t penetrate into the passenger cabin, but burned the lower portion of the left wing, the left engine and the left side of the fuselage.
- The flight data recorder and cockpit voice recorder are being reviewed at the NTSB’s laboratory in Washington, D.C.
- Dynamic International Airways will inspect the remainder of its planes to ensure “fuel line coupling assemblies,” are properly installed.
- NTSB investigators have interviewed the two flight crew members and nine cabin crew members; what they said was not immediately revealed.

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In an accident update released Tuesday, the National Transportation Safety Board also said the jetliner Boeing 767 had been in dry storage for almost two and half years until Dynamic started leasing it in September.

The jet was then flown about 240 hours before it erupted into flames on Thursday, investigator Tim Laffoon said. Both these factors hint that maintenance problems likely played a role.

Dynamic International Airways Flight 414 was supposed to fly to Cancun, Venezuela. As the jet was being taxied, a crew member noticed fuel leaking from the left wing. Fire broke out shortly after, prompting passengers to don oxygen masks in emergency drills.

"Of 90 passengers and 11 crew members onboard the airplane, one was seriously injured and 21 sustained minor injuries as a result of the emergency evacuation," Laffoon wrote in the update.

Other details in the NTSB update: An initial review of the plane's onboard logbook showed no maintenance had been performed — before the accident — on the wing area where the fuel line coupling assembly was found disconnected. The assembly located just above the engine, has been retained for further examination.

See A7, 8A

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Steve Marks, a Miami attorney who specializes in aviation accidents, said placing the aircraft in dry storage for 29 months potentially played a role in the fuel line coupling assembly becoming disconnected.

“Typically planes are stored in Arizona or New Mexico, where the dry climate prevents them from having decay,” he said. “But whenever an aircraft is sitting for so long, there’s a risk that parts can get brittle.”

Marks added that after planes are taken out of storage, they should receive a thorough maintenance inspection.

The NTSB hasn’t said whether that was done.