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# Definition of Accident & Serious Incident

## NOTE

*This paper is an update to and supersedes 22POS02, of the same name.*

## BACKGROUND

ICAO Annex 13, Chapter 1 includes the following definitions:

***Accident.*** An occurrence associated with the operation of an aircraft which, in the case of a manned aircraft, takes place between the time any person boards the aircraft with the intention of flight until such time as all such persons have disembarked, or in the case of an unmanned aircraft, takes place between the time the aircraft is ready to move with the purpose of flight until such time as it comes to rest at the end of the flight and the primary propulsion system is shut down, in which [...]"

***Serious incident.*** An incident involving circumstances indicating that there was a high probability of an accident and associated with the operation of an aircraft which, in the case of a manned aircraft, takes place between the time any person boards the aircraft with the intention of flight until such time as all such persons have disembarked, or in the case of an unmanned aircraft, takes place between the time the aircraft is ready to move with the purpose of flight until such time as it comes to rest at the end of the flight and the primary propulsion system is shut down.

## PROBLEM

There are regular occurrences outside the scope of these ICAO definitions that can be very relevant to the safe operation of aircraft. Here are a few recent examples:

- 12 July 2013 at London Heathrow airport, UK, a fire event occurred on a parked, unoccupied, and electrically un-powered Ethiopian Airlines B787. The fire-affected area, located above the cabin ceiling, typically doesn't have means of fire detection or suppression. Had this event occurred in flight, it would have posed a significant safety concern and raise challenges for extinguishing it.
- 14 April 2014 at Yangon airport, Burma, a Golden Myanmar A320 was left

unattended and unsecured, started moving on its own, and subsequently collided with the tail of a parked Myanmar Airways International A319, leading to substantial damage to both aircraft.

- 4 June 2014 at Rome-Ciampino airport, Italy, a Ryanair B737-800 sustained damage to the right horizontal stabiliser after it rolled backwards into a building.
- 14 June 2014 at Sialkot airport, Pakistan, a Shaheen Air B737 sustained substantial damage when bricks came loose from the pavement following a high-power engine run-up, and struck the horizontal stabilizer.
- More recently, on 22 July 2020 at Shanghai Pudong (PVG) airport, an Ethiopian Airlines Boeing 777-200F was being prepared for departure when smoke was observed coming out of the cabin through the rear entry and service doors. The fire subsequently burnt through the crown of the rear fuselage and its tail collapsed.

Fortunately, there were no reported injuries in these cases, but sudden fires onboard parked aircraft, aircraft moving on their own, or pavement being dislodged, are obviously the result of a safety breakdown and represent a major risk.

Under the current ICAO definition these events are not considered "accidents" as they did not take place "between the time any person boarded the aircraft with the intention of flight until such time as all such persons disembarked". There was therefore no ICAO requirement for an investigation, although these occurrences have clear safety implications and the potential for "lessons learned" that would be of great benefit to the industry.

## POSITION

IFALPA believes that any occurrences which lead to substantial damage to the aircraft or serious injuries, even when they take place at a time when there are no persons onboard the aircraft with the intention of flight, are important to flight safety and should be recognized as such by ICAO. The current ICAO definitions of accident and serious incident are too restrictive and should be revised.