

FAA: Bolt didn't break on jet engine's cone

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

"A break at the bolt" didn't cause a jet engine tail cone to fall 30,000 feet from a British Airways 747 Boeing as it flew over Farmington Hills late March 29, a Federal Aviation Administration official said.

"We're assuming, by virtue of where the metal separated (from the jet engine), that it's due to the expansion and contraction of the metal," said FAA supervisor Larry McCartney at Willow Run Airport, Ypsilanti.

"It didn't break at the bolt. Whenever the lab technicians and engineering people come down, we'll know the reason," McCartney said.

SPECTROGRAPH TESTS will be conducted, he said.

"We need to know why (the tail cone fell off) so we can prevent it from happening again."

A final determination of the cause will probably come in about 30 days, McCartney said.

Engineering staff members are investigating the tail cone — attached to the engine with large bolts — now at Detroit Metropolitan Airport.

"This (type of incident) is rare. But it has happened before. There are a lot of heat contractions and cooling going on. No matter what metal they make it (tail cone) of, it's going to give way eventually," McCartney said.

Tail cones control air flow from

jet engines and help muffle engine noise, much like a car tailpipe. They are made from a titanium alloy.

THE TAIL cone fell just before 11 p.m. March 29 and landed within 15 feet of two Farmington Hills houses on Skye Drive in the Lincolnshire East subdivision, south of 11 Mile, between Middlebelt and Inlander roads. There were no injuries and no damage.

Skye Drive residents, who didn't see the tail cone that night after they heard a loud bang, found it the next morning and called Farmington Hills Police.

The tail cone came from British Airways Flight 296, which left Chicago's O'Hare International Airport

at 9:35 p.m. March 29 with 371 passengers. It flew over Farmington Hills and landed at London's Heathrow International Airport early March 30, without incident.

AT SOME point, the tail cone is expected to be shipped to British Airways offices in Great Britain to be inspected by airline officials and the Civil Aviation Authority's air accident bureau, the FAA counterpart in Britain, said John Lampl, British Airways public relations director in the United States.

"We are very alarmed. It was an unusual incident," Lampl said from his New York office. "It's just a very freak thing."

The 747 tail cone fell from was

15 years old, but Lampl and McCartney confirmed that the engine and tail cone are much younger.

"The engines are replaced all the time," Lampl said.

Replacement occurs every three to five years, he said.

SKYE DRIVE resident Louise Hinde, in whose yard the tail cone fell, said she appreciated British Airways' apology to her husband, Kal, at his office March 30.

But she's still angry about the airline industry's apparent deteriorating safety and maintenance records, she said.

"I thought the apology was nice considering it could have killed us," Hinde said March 31. "It was nice of

them to do that, but I think it's time the public got angry. These planes are not checked properly."

MONDAY, Lampl defended British Airways' safety and maintenance record.

"Our maintenance is top-flight. I'd put us up against any airline in the world. The airworthiness of the plane and the jet propulsion system were not affected (by the missing tail cone). The fact that it fell off did not affect the safety of the airplane."

But one thing that certainly will be checked by British Airways is whether British Airways maintenance crews checked the engine and tail cone — as they are required — before flight, Lampl said.

Owners prepare to sell Chesley

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Chesley Industries is down to its last three employees.

The Farmington wire products plant has shut down operations after its parent company announced late last year it would close by mid-February if a buyer were not found.

"We're just winding down — we're into the clean-up stage," said general manager Mike Callahan. "We're getting ready to show the building." Some half a million dollars in equipment was sold to a company in Arkansas and moved over the past two months.

The 90,000-square-foot building once housed a viable, busy company that made wire baskets and shelving and brought 100 salaried and hourly jobs to the city of Farmington.

Started as a family business in the 1940s, Chesley and Farmington since 1963, Chesley was the second largest company, by size, in the city and the 11th largest taxpayer, according to city records.

Started by the local Chesley family, it was most recently owned by the Hussmann Corp. of St. Louis, which bought it from the family in 1972.

The Chesley Industries building is

owned by Hussmann. It was built in 1963, with additions put on in 1964, 1968 and 1982.

The building, of which 56,000-square-feet represents plant space, sits on nearly three acres. It has a state equalized value of \$961,000, making it worth nearly \$2 million on the open market.

It sits on Chesley Drive, in a small industrial park area north of Eight

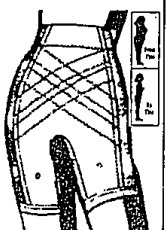
Mile, east of Farmington Road. City officials said earlier this year, vacancy rates along the corridor are small.

Meanwhile, general manager Callahan, who has been with Hussmann for the past 23 years, is hoping to find employment here in Michigan. He has been general manager at the Chesley plant since 1976, and says "my roots are here now."

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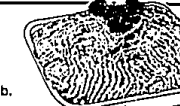
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