## AIRCRAFT INCIDENT

A major air crash that occurs in a heavily populated residential area can result in considerable loss of life and property. The impact of a disabled aircraft as it strikes the ground creates the likely potential for multiple explosions resulting in intense fires. Regardless of where the crash occurs, the resulting explosions and fires have the potential to cause injuries, fatalities, and the destruction of property at and adjacent to the impact point. The time of day when the crash occurs may have a profound effect on the number of dead and injured. Damage assessment and disaster relief efforts associated with an air crash incident will require support from other local governments, private organizations, and state and federal governments.

It can be expected that few, if any, airline passengers will survive a major air crash. The intense fires, until controlled, will limit search and rescue operations. Police barricades will be needed to block off the affected area. The crowds of onlookers and media personnel will have to be controlled. Emergency medical care, food, and temporary shelter will be required by injured or displaced persons. Many families may be separated, particularly if the crash occurs during working hours; and a locator system should be established at a location convenient to the public. In incidents involving civilian aircraft, investigators from the National Transportation and Safety Board (NTSB), with support from the Orange County Sheriff's Department, will have jurisdiction over the crash area and investigations will be completed before the area is released for clean-up. The military has jurisdiction over any incident involving military aircraft. The clean-up operation may consist of removing of large debris, clearing roadways, demolishing unsafe structures, and towing demolished vehicles.

It can be anticipated that the mental health needs of survivors, responders, and the surrounding residents will greatly increase due to the trauma associated with such a catastrophe. A coordinated response team, comprised of behavioral health professionals, should take a proactive approach toward identifying and addressing mental health needs stemming from any traumatic disaster (for more information see the Orange County Aviation Accident Annex and/or NTSB response plan).

It is impossible to totally prepare, either physically or psychologically, for the aftermath of a major air crash. However, since southern California has become one of the nation's most overcrowded air spaces, air crash incidents are no longer a probability but a reality. Therefore, air crash incidents must be included among other potential disasters. The Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) requires that John Wayne Airport conduct a field exercise every two years. OA members participate in this exercise.

Air crash incidents are not limited to large commercial planes; even small planes can cause major problems. On December 16, 2002 a Piper PA-24-250 went down in an Anaheim Hills neighborhood. The propeller came to rest in the principal impact crater (PIC) and the inverted engine came to rest several feet from the PIC in the direction of the main wreckage. The cabin area came to rest in a garage. Witnesses stated that the garage exploded and burst into flames several minutes after the accident. Wreckage

pieces that were not inside the garage were not charred. Approximately 2/3 of the left wing separated from the cabin area by the garage wall. A portion of the right wing was in the street in front of the garage. Debris from the airplane was strewn along for approximately 1/4 mile.

The use of aircraft as a WMD must always be considered. The events of September 11, 2001, make it clear that any size aircraft becomes a potential weapon in the hands of terrorists.

Additionally, with the number of flights traveling over Orange County on a daily basis, the potential for a terrorist incident involving the shooting down of an aircraft with shoulder fired missiles, similar to the incident in the New York in the early 2000s, needs to be considered in all planning scenarios. The area with the highest potential for such a terrorist-related incident would be on the approach to or departure from John Wayne Airport where the aircraft are at a low altitude and slower speed.

## **SPECIFIC SITUATION**

Increasingly heavy air traffic over the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area and Orange County are constant reminders of the possibility of aircraft accidents in Orange County. Within and surrounding Orange County there are multiple airports with air traffic lanes within the County. Aircraft crashes may occur anywhere within the County, therefore residential areas, business districts, and industrial areas are all equally in jeopardy.

The airports in and adjacent to Orange County which handle the greatest amount of air traffic are as follows:

- Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) LAX is the fifth busiest airport in the world based on number of passengers. In 2006, LAX handled 70 percent of the passengers, 75 percent of the air cargo, and 95 percent of the international passenger and cargo traffic in the five-county Southern California region. There were 656,842 takeoffs and landings in 2006. Planes arrive and depart at a rate of one per minute.
- Long Beach Airport (LGB) LGB has a maximum of 41 daily commercial flights and 25 commuter flights. There are very strict noise pollution controls at LGB, based on the current noise levels allowance, which limit the airports operations to the hours of 7:00 AM to 10:00 PM.
- **John Wayne Airport (SNA)** In 2006, 9.6 million passengers were served at SNA. Similar to LGB, SNA's hours of operation are restricted to 7:00 AM to 10:00 PM
- Ontario Airport (ONT) Passenger traffic at ONT has been increasing steadily for the past ten years. In 2006, seven million passengers used the airport and 602,326 tons of air freight was shipped.
- **Burbank Airport (BUR)** BUR has experienced approximately a 9.4 percent growth rate since 1993. In 2006, it served 5,689,291 travelers on seven major carriers,

with more than 70 flights daily. Also, airport hours of operation are restricted to 7:00 AM to 10:00 PM.

• Los Alamitos Armed Forces Reserve Station — This station is located in the west part of the County close to LGB is an active military base available to the region for receiving disaster resources from throughout the State. Numerous military flights leave and land on a daily basis.

Aircraft flying over Orange County are located in the Los Angeles Terminal Control Area (TCA). The TCA is airspace restricted to large, commercial airliners. Each TCA has an established maximum and minimum altitude in which a large aircraft must travel. Smaller aircraft desiring to transit the TCA may do so by obtaining Air Traffic Control clearance. Aircraft departing from other than LAX, whose route of flight would penetrate the TCA, are required to give this information to Air Traffic Control. Pilots operating small aircraft often rely on geographical landmarks, rather than charts, to indicate their locations. If a pilot is unfamiliar with the geographical landmarks of the southern California basin, he/she may misinterpret a particular landmark and inadvertently enter the restricted TCA airspace. This misunderstanding could result in a mid-air collision.

Figure 2 – Map of Orange County Airport Locations

