

§ 2254. Treatment of reports of aircraft accident investigations

(a) IN GENERAL.—(1) Whenever the Secretary of a military department conducts an accident investigation of an accident involving an aircraft under the jurisdiction of the Secretary, the records and report of the investigations shall be treated in accordance with this section.

(2) For purposes of this section, an accident investigation is any form of investigation of an aircraft accident other than an investigation (known as a “safety investigation”) that is conducted solely to determine the cause of the accident and to obtain information that may prevent the occurrence of similar accidents.

(b) PUBLIC DISCLOSURE OF CERTAIN ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION INFORMATION.—(1) The Secretary concerned, upon request, shall publicly disclose unclassified tapes, scientific reports, and other factual information pertinent to an aircraft accident investigation, before the release of the final accident investigation report relating to the accident, if the Secretary concerned determines—

(A) that such tapes, reports, or other information would be included within and releasable with the final accident investigation report; and

(B) that release of such tapes, reports, or other information—

(i) would not undermine the ability of accident or safety investigators to continue to conduct the investigation; and

(ii) would not compromise national security.

(2) A disclosure under paragraph (1) may not be made by or through officials with responsibility for, or who are conducting, a safety investigation with respect to the accident.

(c) OPINIONS REGARDING CAUSATION OF ACCIDENT.—Following a military aircraft accident—

(1) if the evidence surrounding the accident is sufficient for the investigators who conduct the accident investigation to come to an opinion (or opinions) as to the cause or causes of the accident, the final report of the accident investigation shall set forth the opinion (or opinions) of the investigators as to the cause or causes of the accident; and

(2) if the evidence surrounding the accident is not sufficient for those investigators to come to an opinion as to the cause or causes of the accident, the final report of the accident investigation shall include a description of those factors, if any, that, in the opinion of the investigators, substantially contributed to or caused the accident.

(d) USE OF INFORMATION IN CIVIL PROCEEDINGS.—For purposes of any civil or criminal proceeding arising from an aircraft accident, any opinion of the accident investigators as to the cause of, or the factors contributing to, the accident set forth in the accident investigation report may not be considered as evidence in such proceeding, nor may such information be considered an admission of liability by the United States or by any person referred to in those conclusions or statements.

(e) REGULATIONS.—The Secretary of each military department shall prescribe regulations to carry out this section.

(Added Pub. L. 102-484, div. A, title X, § 1071(a)(1), Oct. 23, 1992, 106 Stat. 2507.)

Statutory Notes and Related Subsidiaries

EFFECTIVE DATE

Pub. L. 102-484, div. A, title X, § 1071(c), Oct. 23, 1992, 106 Stat. 2508, provided that: “Section 2254 of title 10, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall apply with respect to accidents occurring on or after the date on which regulations are first prescribed under that section.”

REGULATIONS

Pub. L. 105-261, div. A, title X, § 1065(c), Oct. 17, 1998, 112 Stat. 2134, provided that: “The Secretary of Defense shall prescribe regulations, which shall be applied uniformly across the Department of Defense, establishing procedures by which the military departments shall provide to the family members of any person involved in a military aviation accident periodic update reports on the conduct and progress of investigations into the accident.”

Pub. L. 102-484, div. A, title X, § 1071(b), Oct. 23, 1992, 106 Stat. 2508, provided that: “Regulations under section 2254 of title 10, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall be prescribed not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act [Oct. 23, 1992].”

§ 2254a. Data files of military flight operations quality assurance systems: exemption from disclosure under Freedom of Information Act

(a) AUTHORITY TO EXEMPT CERTAIN DATA FILES FROM DISCLOSURE UNDER FOIA.—

(1) The Secretary of Defense may exempt information contained in any data file of the military flight operations quality assurance system of a military department from disclosure under section 552(b)(3) of title 5, upon a written determination that—

(A) the information is sensitive information concerning military aircraft, units, or aircrew; and

(B) the public interest consideration in the disclosure of such information does not outweigh preventing the disclosure of such information.

(2) In this section, the term “data file” means a file of the military flight operations quality assurance (in this section referred to as “MFOQA”) system that contains information acquired or generated by the MFOQA system, including—

(A) any data base containing raw MFOQA data; and

(B) any analysis or report generated by the MFOQA system or which is derived from MFOQA data.

(3) Information that is exempt under paragraph (1) from disclosure under section 552(b)(3) of title 5 shall be exempt from such disclosure even if such information is contained in a data file that is not exempt in its entirety from such disclosure.

(4) The provisions of paragraph (1) may not be superseded except by a provision of law which is enacted after the date of the enactment of this section and which specifically cites and repeals or modifies those provisions.

(b) REGULATIONS.—The Secretary of Defense shall prescribe regulations for the administra-

tion of this section. Such regulations shall ensure consistent application of the authority in subsection (a) across the military departments.

(c) **TRANSPARENCY.**—Each determination of the Secretary under subsection (a) shall be made in writing and accompanied by a statement of the basis for the determination. All such determinations and statements of basis shall be available to the public, upon request.

(Added Pub. L. 112–81, div. A, title X, § 1082(a)(1), Dec. 31, 2011, 125 Stat. 1600; amended Pub. L. 118–31, div. A, title IX, § 901(e)(2), Dec. 22, 2023, 137 Stat. 355.)

Editorial Notes

REFERENCES IN TEXT

The date of the enactment of this section, referred to in subsec. (a)(4), is the date of enactment of Pub. L. 112–81, which was approved Dec. 31, 2011.

AMENDMENTS

2023—Subsecs. (c), (d). Pub. L. 118–31 redesignated subsec. (d) as (c), struck out “, or the Secretary’s designee,” after “Secretary” and “, through the Office of the Director of Administration and Management” after “request”, and struck out former subsec. (c). Prior to amendment, text of subsec. (c) read as follows: “The Secretary of Defense may delegate the authority to make a determination under subsection (a) to the Director of Administration and Management of the Department.”

Statutory Notes and Related Subsidiaries

EFFECTIVE DATE

Pub. L. 112–81, div. A, title X, § 1082(b), Dec. 31, 2011, 125 Stat. 1601, provided that: “Section 2254a of title 10, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall apply to any information entered into any data file of the military flight operations quality assurance system before, on, or after the date of the enactment of this Act [Dec. 31, 2011].”

§ 2255. Aircraft accident investigation boards: composition requirements

(a) **REQUIRED MEMBERSHIP OF BOARDS.**—Whenever the Secretary of a military department convenes an aircraft accident investigation board to conduct an accident investigation (as described in section 2254(a)(2) of this title) with respect to a Class A accident involving an aircraft under the jurisdiction of the Secretary, the Secretary shall select the membership of the board so that—

(1) a majority of the members (or in the case of a board consisting of a single member, the member) is selected from units other than the mishap unit or a unit subordinate to the mishap unit; and

(2) in the case of a board consisting of more than one member, at least one member of the board is a member of the armed forces or an officer or an employee of the Department of Defense who possesses knowledge and expertise relevant to aircraft accident investigations.

(b) **EXCEPTION.**—The Secretary of the military department concerned may waive the requirement of subsection (a)(1) in the case of an aircraft accident if the Secretary determines that—

(1) it is not practicable to meet the requirement because of—

(A) the remote location of the aircraft accident;

(B) an urgent need to promptly begin the investigation; or

(C) a lack of available persons outside of the mishap unit who have adequate knowledge and expertise regarding the type of aircraft involved in the accident; and

(2) the objectivity and independence of the aircraft accident investigation board will not be compromised.

(c) **CONSULTATION REQUIREMENT.**—In the case of an aircraft accident investigation board consisting of a single member, the member shall consult with a member of the armed forces or an officer or an employee of the Department of Defense who possesses knowledge and expertise relevant to aircraft accident investigations.

(d) **DESIGNATION OF CLASS A ACCIDENTS.**—Not later than 60 days after an aircraft accident involving an aircraft under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of a military department, the Secretary shall determine whether the aircraft accident should be designated as a Class A accident for purposes of this section.

(e) **DEFINITIONS.**—In this section:

(1) The term “Class A accident” means an accident involving an aircraft that results in—

(A) the loss of life or permanent disability;

(B) damages to the aircraft, other property, or a combination of both, in an amount in excess of the amount specified by the Secretary of Defense for purposes of determining Class A accidents; or

(C) the destruction of the aircraft.

(2) The term “mishap unit”, with respect to an aircraft accident investigation, means the unit of the armed forces (at the squadron or battalion level or equivalent) to which was assigned the flight crew of the aircraft that sustained the accident that is the subject of the investigation.

(Added Pub. L. 104–201, div. A, title IX, § 911(a)(1), Sept. 23, 1996, 110 Stat. 2621; amended Pub. L. 108–136, div. A, title X, § 1031(a)(13), Nov. 24, 2003, 117 Stat. 1597.)

Editorial Notes

AMENDMENTS

2003—Subsec. (b). Pub. L. 108–136 struck out par. (1) designation before “The Secretary”, redesignated subpars. (A) and (B) of former par. (1) as pars. (1) and (2), respectively, redesignated cls. (i) to (iii) of former subpar. (A) as subpars. (A) to (C), respectively, of par. (1), and struck out par. (2) which read as follows: “The Secretary shall notify Congress of a waiver exercised under this subsection and the reasons therefor.”

Statutory Notes and Related Subsidiaries

EFFECTIVE DATE

Pub. L. 104–201, div. A, title IX, § 911(b), Sept. 23, 1996, 110 Stat. 2622, provided that: “Section 2255 of title 10, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall apply with respect to any aircraft accident investigation board convened by the Secretary of a military department after the end of the six-month period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act [Sept. 23, 1996].”