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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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State releases study of fatal airplane crashes in Alaska

Renewed caution and diligence encouraged

(Anchorage, AK) — A study published today by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Section of Epidemiology shows that while the number of aviation crashes and fatalities has declined over the past decade, the number of fatal crashes and fatalities between January and August 2010 were higher than average.

According to the study, the exact reasons for this increase are currently unclear since many investigations are ongoing. However, the study cites stable weather systems that have produced one of the coldest, gloomiest, and wettest summers on record for Southcentral Alaska as having created a potential crash hazard.

“Besides being difficult to fly in, the long stretch of poor weather may have affected pilot proficiency by limiting time in the air,” said Mary O’Connor with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, who co-authored the study. “Pilot hours may have been further reduced due to the high price of aviation fuel and other operational costs.”

The study lists several recommendations for increasing pilot safety and proficiency, including:

- a continued focus on crash prevention through efforts such as the Medallion Foundation’s simulators and training programs, and Federal Aviation Administration and Alaskan Aviation Safety Foundation-sponsored safety seminars;
- weather information to be continually enhanced and made easily available for pilots; and
- encouraging general aviation aircraft to have Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) equipment (similar to equipment used in the Capstone Project).

The complete study is available at: http://www.epi.alaska.gov/bulletins/docs/b2010_30.pdf

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