

## PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

As the coordinator of family assistance resources during a passenger rail accident investigation, the TDA Division relies on support from the following agencies and other organizations in accordance with the Federal Family Assistance Plan for Rail Passenger Disasters.

- Passenger Rail Carriers
- State, county, and local government agencies
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
- Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
- Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
- Department of Defense (DOD)
- Department of State (DOS)
- American Red Cross



## National Transportation Safety Board

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

The TDA Division can be contacted by calling (800) 683-9369 or (202) 314-6185 or, by email at [assistance@ntsb.gov](mailto:assistance@ntsb.gov)

National Transportation Safety Board  
[www.nts.gov](http://www.nts.gov)

Transportation Disaster Assistance Division  
[www.nts.gov/tda](http://www.nts.gov/tda)

### Transportation Disaster Assistance Division

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# Passenger Rail Accident Investigations

Information for Families, Survivors, and Friends

NTSB Accident # \_\_\_\_\_

TDA Specialist: \_\_\_\_\_

## NTSB Accident Investigation Process

Go-Team Launch

On-Scene Investigation

Post On-Scene Investigation

Technical Review

Report Development

Report Reviews

Final Report



National Transportation Safety Board  
Transportation Disaster Assistance Division

# FAMILY ASSISTANCE OPERATIONS

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## WHAT IS NTSB?

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating and determining the probable cause of selected passenger rail accidents, as well as all civil aviation and selected highway, marine, and pipeline accidents in the United States. The NTSB has no authority to regulate the rail industry, which is the responsibility of the Federal Railroad Administration, an agency of the U.S. Department of Transportation. NTSB safety recommendations developed from investigations are aimed at preventing future accidents and are issued to public and private organizations in a position to improve rail safety.

## WHAT IS TDA?

As required by the Rail Passenger Disaster Family Assistance Act of 2008, the NTSB's Transportation Disaster Assistance (TDA) Division coordinates the resources of federal, state, and local agencies, passenger rail carriers, and the American Red Cross to meet the needs of family members and survivors. The TDA Division also serves as the primary resource to family members and survivors for investigative information.

## ON-SCENE ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION ACTIVITIES

When notified of a major accident, the NTSB launches a Go-team led by an investigator-in-charge (IIC) and supported by technical specialists in track construction and maintenance, mechanical systems, signal systems, railroad operations, survivability, and human performance. An NTSB Board Member accompanies the team and serves as the agency spokesperson. Public affairs staff organize media interaction regarding the investigation. The NTSB does not coordinate or attend media interviews with families.

## FAMILY ASSISTANCE CENTER

The Family Assistance Center (FAC) is a secure meeting place established by the passenger rail carrier for family members, survivors, and friends to obtain services and receive initial information about the investigation. The FAC remains open throughout the on-scene investigation work. Personnel from the TDA Division, the American Red Cross, the passenger rail carrier, and selected government agencies staff the FAC. Access to the FAC is controlled by identification badges issued by the rail passenger carrier. For families unable to travel to the FAC, arrangements are made to ensure that the same information and services are available.

## DAILY FAMILY BRIEFINGS

The TDA Division coordinates periodic daily briefings to update families, survivors, and friends on the progress of the investigation, access to support services, and other topics associated with the accident response. The family briefings are held in the FAC. Families unable to attend the briefings in person can participate through an operator-assisted, pass code-protected telephone conference bridge.

## CRISIS COUNSELING SERVICES

At the FAC, professional crisis counseling services are available to family members, survivors, and friends through the American Red Cross. For those unable to travel to the FAC or after families have returned home, short-term crisis intervention services are available through their local American Red Cross chapters. Please contact the TDA Division for additional information.

## FAMILIES OF FOREIGN CITIZENS

The Department of State secures translation and communication services, provides official notification to foreign governments, assists with visa services, and facilitates consular services for families of foreign citizens.

## VICTIM IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

Victim recovery, identification, and death certification are the responsibility of the local medical examiner or coroner. To assist in this process, families may be asked to participate in an interview designed to collect information that will facilitate victim identification. During the interview, families may be asked to provide contact information for the doctor and dentist of the victim and to provide a DNA sample. This process is discussed during the family briefings and questions pertaining to this process should be directed to the local medical examiner or coroner. Contact information for the medical examiner or coroner is available at the FAC or by contacting the TDA Division.

## PERSONAL EFFECTS

Collecting and returning the personal effects of the victims is a shared responsibility between the passenger rail carrier and the local medical examiner or coroner. The complexity and scope of the accident scene influences the time needed to recover, stabilize, process, and return personal effects. Family members and survivors are provided information about the personal effects process during the family briefings.

## STAYING INFORMED

While on-scene, the daily family briefings are the primary source for factual investigative updates. The complex nature of accidents and extensive nature of NTSB accident investigations may result in a year or longer to publish a final report. During the investigation process, there are several investigative milestones. These include the release of a public docket containing factual data about the accident and a public Board Meeting concluding the investigation. Family members will receive notification of these milestones and can contact the TDA Division if they have additional questions.