

Crash Plans

Asiana Hit With First U.S. Fine for Dismal Post-Crash Communication

By [Justin Bachman](#) February 26, 2014



Photograph by Marcio Jose Sanchez/AP Photo

The wreckage of Asiana Flight 214 on the ground after it crashed at the San Francisco International Airport in July 2013

When a commercial airplane crashes in the U.S., the federal government requires certain measures as part of an airline's "family assistance plan." The airline must quickly activate a toll-free number through which employees can receive calls from people worried that a loved one was on the flight and must rapidly notify the families of all passengers confirmed to be involved. There also must be sufficient resources to assure that the assistance plan, including generous help for passengers, is carried out under the crisis conditions a crash inflicts on a carrier.

Asiana Airlines ([020560:KS](#)) had none of those in place on July 6, when Flight 214 approached San Francisco International Airport too slowly and struck a seawall before splitting apart as it barreled along the runway, flipping over and catching fire. For the first time ever, federal regulators on Tuesday assessed the Korean carrier a \$500,000 fine for shortcomings in passenger assistance following the crash. [Somewhat miraculously](#), only three passengers of 291 aboard the Boeing 777 died; all 16 crew members survived.

In the aftermath, however, the Department of Transportation found that Asiana did not have a toll-free number set up until nearly 19 hours after the crash, forcing people seeking information to search the airline's website for a phone number and "navigate through cumbersome automated menus" before reaching an airline employee. Asiana also took two days to contact just three-quarters of the passengers' families—and several families had not been contacted until five days after the crash, the DOT said.

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Asiana also lacked adequate resources to conduct the plan on its own, needing help from a partner airline, and did not have employees from South Korea in place until July 8. The airline said in the consent order that the crash occurred on the July 4th holiday weekend, 16 hours behind Seoul, where it was 3:28 a.m. on a Sunday. Several officials with Asiana's regional offices in Los Angeles drove to San Francisco to help deal with the emergency because the airport was closed.

After the crash, the Associated Press [reviewed](#) assistance plans filed by 24 foreign airlines with U.S. regulators and found that some had not updated them, as required by law. The story prompted several, including Korean Air ([003490:KS](#)), to update their assistance plans. Many airlines invest in crash preparedness and assistance planning, but some are "using lip service and euphemisms in their plans," Robert A. Jensen, whose company has contracts with hundreds of airlines to help after an accident, [told the AP](#). "Somebody finally got caught."

[STORY: Asiana Flight 214's Crash Shows Airline Safety Progress](#)

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[Bachman](#) is an associate editor for Businessweek.com.