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## Aviation Fatalities Hit 7-Year High In 2025, Per Aviation Safety Network

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- An airplane takes off as a large portion of the damaged plane fuselage is lifted from the Potomac River during recovery efforts after the American Airlines crash on February 03, 2025 in Arlington, Virginia. An American Airlines flight from Wichita, Kansas collided midair with a military Black Hawk helicopter while on approach to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport on January 29, 2025 outside of Washington, DC. (Photo by Chip Somodevilla)

The New Year is roaring on, but so far there has been little comment on the increase in the deaths of airline passengers in 2025. According to data from the [Aviation Safety Network](#) (ASN) Safety Database, 548 people died in aircraft accidents in 2025, the most in seven years.

The 548 deaths in 2025 represent a more than 30% increase over 2024, when 404 aviation fatalities occurred. And according to the database, the 2025 fatality total was

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the highest death total since [2018, when 962 people died](#). That year included the first Boeing 737 MAX accident, a Lion Air aircraft that crashed off Indonesia, killing 189.

One positive the Safety Database showed was a decline in the number of total incidents from 2024 to 2025. In 2024, there were 219 accidents, but in 2025, only 156 were recorded.

As is often the case, two accidents accounted for more than half of the flight fatalities last year.

On January 29, 2025, a Bombardier CRJ-701ER regional jetliner operated by American Eagle collided with a Sikorsky UH-60L helicopter operated by the US Army. The collision took place near Washington-Ronald Reagan National Airport. All 64 passengers and crew on board the CRJ-701ER were killed, as was the helicopter crew of three.

This week, the National Transportation Safety Board will [release](#) more information on the causes of the crash. The FAA has already [made changes](#) to try to ensure that military helicopters and civilian airliners do not share the same airspace.



- The back of Air India flight 171 is pictured at the site after it crashed in a residential area near the airport in Ahmedabad on June 12, 2025. A London-bound passenger plane crashed in the Indian city of Ahmedabad on June 12 and all 242 people on board were believed killed, with the jet smashing into buildings housing doctors and their families. (Photo by SAM PANTHAKY)

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On June 2, 2025, an Air India Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner crashed at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport in Ahmedabad, India. Some 241 people on board the widebody jet died, as did 19 on the ground. The Air India crash was the deadliest in almost 11 years, since the shoot down of a [Malaysian Airlines](#) jet in 2014 killing 298.

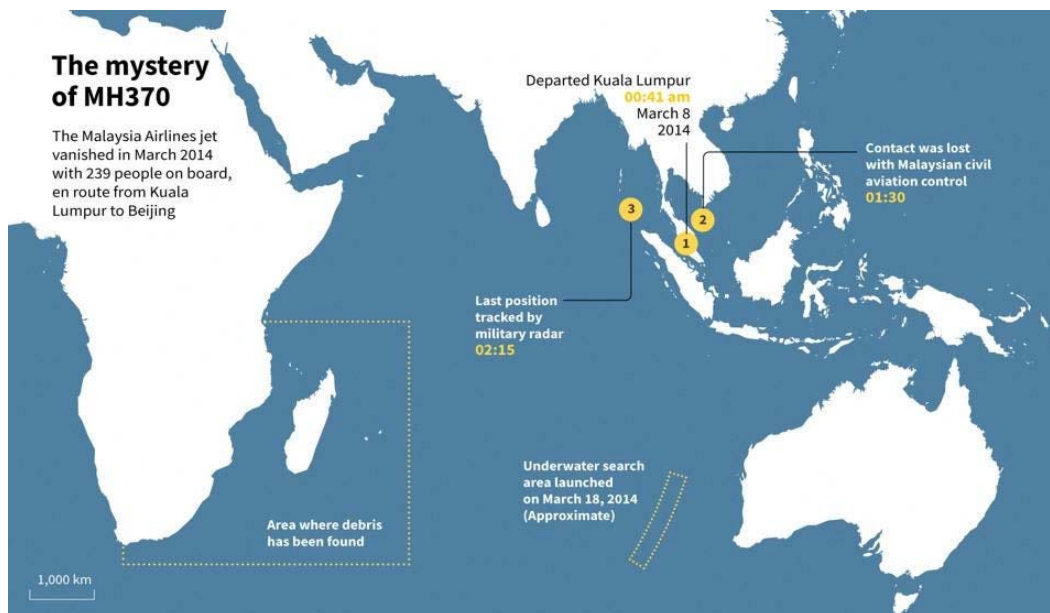
The 327 fatalities in the Washington, DC and Indian accidents represented about 60% of aviation deaths in 2025.

Captain John Cox notes that the safety statistics for 2025 are “skewed because of the loss of a widebody aircraft.” Cox, a former Boeing 737 and Airbus A320 pilot with over 10,000 hours and the president and CEO of Safety Operating Systems LLC, has worked as an accident investigator for over 30 years.

He says there don't seem to be any common factors in 2025's accidents, whether aircraft handling issues, weather, mechanical failure or hostile attacks. “Repetitive accidents are the ones that drive us crazy.” Even during the so-called Golden Years of travel, the 1950's, known problems such as propellor and engine control in the [Boeing Stratocruiser](#) caused repeated crashes.

Now, the airline industry is on track to report a [record 5.2 billion](#) passengers worldwide, a 6.7% increase from 2024. In November 2025, load factors reached a new record load factor of 83.7% according to Willie Walsh, IATA's Director General.

And while the passenger count hit a record , the death toll in 2025 is lower than most recent years tracked by ASN, such the 962 fatalities in 2018 or the 1214 deaths in 2014.



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- Map outlining the main locations relating to the 2014 disappearance of Malaysia Airlines flight **MH370** (Graphic by John SAEKI and Nicholas SHEARMAN)

That year included the disappearance on March 8, 2014, of a Malaysia Airlines 777 “within the Indian Ocean,” killing 239. And on July 17, 2014, another Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777 was destroyed above Hrabove in Eastern Ukraine by a Russian Buk missile, killing 298.

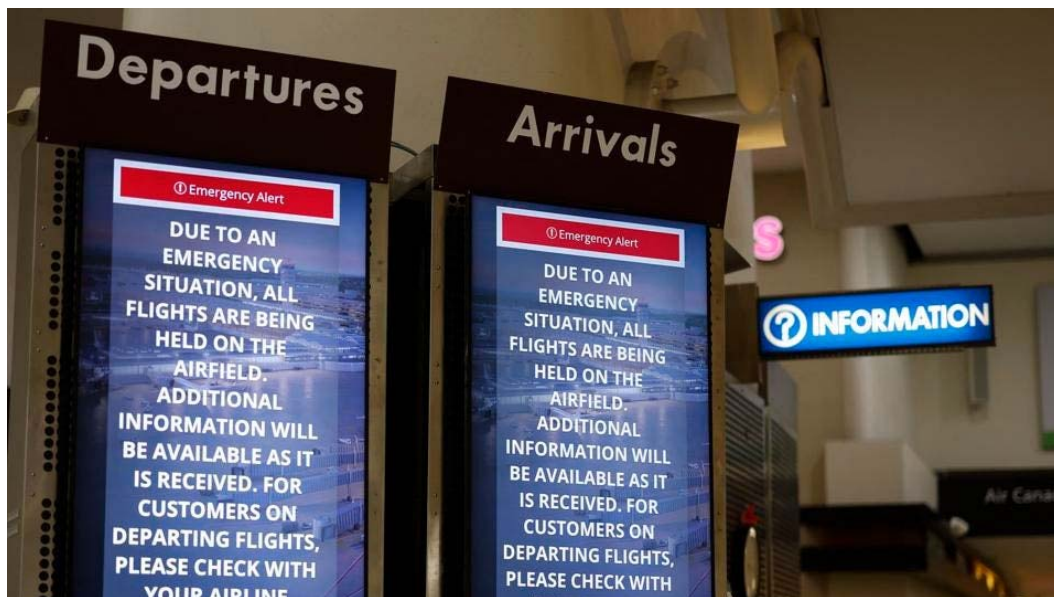
Cox says that over time safety has been constantly improved and the number of accidents has gone. He notes that the original Wright flyer credited with the first powered flight in 1903 was essentially destroyed after four flights.

Cox learned to fly in 1970. “If we had maintained the same accident rate as in 1970, there would have been 70,000 additional fatalities from 1970 to today.”

One of the most controversial accidents last year was the mid-air crash over the Potomac between a regional airliner heading into Reagan National and a U.S. Army helicopter from a nearby base.

Asked “Was DC an accident waiting to happen?” Cox, who flew into and out of Reagan Airport many times, says, “Having helicopters near you was common. All the helicopter pilots knew they had to pass behind the jet. That procedure can be run safely, although there were some close encounters. Hard to say categorically its unsafe.”

When an accident does occur, many are frustrated as it can take a year or more for it to be fully investigated and a cause assigned.



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- Departures and arrivals information screens in Reagan National Airport display emergency instructions after a plane crashed into the Potomac River outside Washington, DC, January 30, 2025. A regional jet from Kansas crashed into Washington's Potomac River after colliding mid-air with a military helicopter near Reagan National Airport, officials said January 29, prompting a major emergency response and grounding all flights. (Photo by TING SHEN)

But Cox notes that it can take years for an investigation to be successfully completed.

In September 1994, a Boeing 737-300 flying from Chicago O'Hare was scheduled to land in Pittsburgh. Instead, the plane plunged to the ground near Hopewell, PA, killing 132. The investigation of the fatal [crash of US Air Flight 427](#), which Cox worked on, **took four and a half years and was the longest accident investigation in history.**

As Cox puts it, "We couldn't get the [rudder control] unit to fail." Yet the team knew a United 737 had a similar tragic accident in 1991. After testing the rudder control thousands of times and hearing reports from flight crew of another 737 that survived a similar issue, the failed part was identified. The rudder controls on all 737 aircraft were redesigned and modified.

Although denied so far by investigators, the Air India Dreamliner crash brings up the specter of **"suicide by pilot."** The evidence suggests that the fuel switches for both engines were turned off just after takeoff. Cox says, "It's a positive lock. You have to move that switch over a gate. A human moved that switch—we don't know why."

A **number of the so-called suicide by pilot cases have been investigated or suspected,** including the infamous 2014 disappearance of Malaysian Airlines MH370 and the 239 people on board.

German investigators concluded that the [Eurowings airline disaster](#) in 2015 was caused by the co-pilot locking out the pilot and deliberately crashing into the French Alps, killing 150. More recently, investigators believe that China Eastern Flight 5735, which plunged to earth in 2022 killing 132, was destroyed in an **intentional crash.** However, China's Civil Aviation Administration (CAAC) refused to release investigation reports in 2025, [claiming](#) that "disclosure may endanger national security and societal stability."

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- FRANKFURT, GERMANY - MARCH 14: In this photo , co-pilot of Germanwings flight 4U 9525 Andreas Lubitz participates in the Frankfurt City Half-Marathon on March 14, 2010 in Frankfurt, Germany. Lubitz is suspected of having deliberately piloted Germanwings flight 4U 9525 into a mountain in southern France on March 24, 2015 and killing all 150 people on board, including himself, in the worst air disaster in Europe in recent history.

With the Air India crash, Cox says that the “fuel switches moved from run to cutoff and moved back to run—is an absolute fact.” The fuel switches were designed to make an accidental shut-off extremely difficult. Cox says, “In half a billion flight hours, I could not find an incident of it happening.” He believes that the fuel shut off was either “deliberate action by a pilot or accidental action by a pilot.”

If the Air India crash is eventually proven to be suicide by pilot, Cox says, “It’s beyond me how someone who trains for years to protect the passengers can do this.” Cox believes Indian safety officials are doing a thorough job of investigating the accident.

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Still, pilots are subject to the same pressures and temptations as the rest of us. In November 2025, former Alaska Airlines pilot Joseph Emerson was [sentenced](#) to time served and three years' probation **for trying to shut off the engines on an Horizon flight**. He was flying as a passenger while high on magic mushrooms.

“Proficiency for professional pilots is very high,” says Cox. He notes that pilots have to get medical exams every six months. Commercial pilots also get check rides with supervising pilots every six months. Cox says, “They pile it on, medical emergency, turbulence, you name it, to puts you under stress deliberately.”

Cox believes airlines are more of the most regulated and safest industries in the world. “If you look at the broader picture, 2025 was an average year for aviation with one fatal accident per 7 million flights, out of 35 million flights. The number of accidents ticked up, but only to the average of the preceding ten years.”

“The most dangerous part of flying is the drive to the airport,” Cox says. “Still, one death is too many. We never get good enough.”



- An Air India Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner landing at Copenhagen Kastrup airport. The Air India Boeing 787-8 aircraft seats 256 passengers in a two-class configuration and is used on long-haul routes. This aircraft has 18 seats in Business Class and 238 Economy. (Photo by Fabrizio Gandolfo)

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