The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Wreckage of Missing Plane Found

By Alexandra Odynova

August 10, 2011



Debris from a 48-year-old cargo plane that disappeared from radar screens in the Magadan region has been found strewn across five kilometers of hilly taiga in the area, emergency officials said Wednesday.

No survivors were found in the wreckage of the turboprop plane, which went missing Tuesday on a flight from the city of Magadan to a village in Chukotka, the local branch of the Emergency Situations Ministry said, Interfax reported. It said some bodies were discovered, but did not specify whether all 11 people on board were accounted for.

The An-12, the oldest model of the aircraft still in operation in Russia, crashed near the Dzhulyetta gold mine after the pilot reported a fuel leak followed by a fire in one of its four engines.

A 18-hour search operation was cut short by nightfall but was to resume Thursday, the ministry's local branch said in a statement.

One of the An-12's two flight recorders was recovered, a local law enforcement source told Interfax, without elaborating.

The plane most likely crashed because of a mechanical failure, pilot error or both, the Investigative Committee said in a statement. It has opened an investigation on charges of safety-rule violations that resulted in deaths, but has named no suspects.

Investigators are analyzing samples of the fuel pumped into the aircraft for its final flight at the Magadan airport, the statement added.

Twelve other An-12s are in operation in Russia, and all have been grounded until owners improve their airworthiness, the Federal Transportation Inspection Service said in a statement. It did not elaborate on expected measures. An industry database, Russianplanes.net, puts the number of operational An-12s at 32. The discrepancy could not be immediately explained.

The Federal Air Transportation Agency said it had no plans to ban the An-12, Izvestia reported. President Dmitry Medvedev has called for an eventual ban on the Tu-134 twin-engine jet and the An-24 twin-engine turboprop, two other aging Soviet-built aircraft involved in accidents with fatalities in remote regions of the country this summer.

Also Wednesday, the presidential envoy to the Far Eastern Federal District called for the creation of a new far eastern airline aimed at raising safety standards in the region.

"The existing independent airlines in the Far East cannot upgrade their fleets. Because of this, there are air accidents," envoy Viktor Ishayev told journalists.

"No one is going to give the existing airlines large loans to buy new, modern aircraft; they cannot rent large hangars or repair facilities," he said.

Ishayev said he had repeatedly appealed to the Transportation Ministry to consider creating a far eastern subsidiary of a major national carrier such as Aeroflot, but that he had seen no action despite words of support.

Andrei Rozhkov, a transportation analyst with Metropol, said any interest in the airline would be hampered by prohibitive startup costs.

"Renewing the fleets or introducing a new one would cost $900 million to $1 billion," he said by telephone. "I don't think the authorities in the Far East have this kind of money for such a project, so I don't think we will see any concrete plans in this direction in the next couple of years."

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/08/10/wreckage-of-missing-plane-found-a8827