

Mistaken landing at Newark

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NEWARK, N.J. — To an experienced pilot, Runway 29 at Newark Liberty International Airport is hard to miss. It is half a football field wide, and like all jet runways, is marked by white lights on each side and down its center line.

All of which has left some aviation officials surprised and alarmed that a Boeing 757 mistakenly landed on an adjacent taxiway last weekend.

Aviation experts said the incident last Saturday night points up the potential for tragedy and the need for better runway safety technology.

"It's an incredibly dangerous thing," said Justin Green, a New York lawyer specializing in aviation litigation and a former Marine accident investigator.

Over the years, airliners have taken off or landed on the wrong runway; in August, for example, 49 people were killed when a commuter jet made a wrong turn and

took off from a too-short runway in Lexington, Ky. But it is extremely rare for a jet to set down on a taxiway — so rare that aviation experts said they cannot even remember the last time it happened.

The National Transportation Safety Board is investigating last weekend's incident, which involved a Continental Airlines flight carrying 154 people from Orlando, Fla. Both pilots have been grounded by the airline.

The NTSB said Thursday it was still awaiting statements from

airport worries air experts

members of the flight crew. Jill Andrews, who is leading the investigation, said it was up to Continental to decide whether to test the pilots for drugs or alcohol.

A Continental spokeswoman had no comment. The names of the pilots have not been released.

The plane set down on a taxiway that runs parallel to the runway and is close to it.

The taxiway is used to tow airplanes between parking areas and other parts of the airport, and smaller vehicles use the area just off the

taxiway to move other equipment. Hangars are nearby.

According to the NTSB's preliminary report, Flight 1883 was initially cleared for an approach to Runway 22L. Runway 22L is equipped with an Instrument Landing System, which displays in the cockpit whether a plane is lined up with the middle of the runway.

The plane was then directed to turn and land on Runway 29, which is not equipped with ILS; pilots line up the plane visually.

The "ILS circling approach" to

Runway 29 is common, according to Russ Halleran, president of the air traffic controllers union at Newark.

Planes are often ordered to land on that runway when there are strong crosswinds from the west, as there were on Saturday.

That could present a challenge to pilots, particularly if they are unfamiliar with the airport's layout, some experts said. Saturday's landing also occurred at dusk, which could have been a factor, they said.