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By LUKAS I. ALPERT

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February 15, 2009

With investigators suspecting a buildup of ice on the wings and tail of the plane that crashed and killed 50 near Buffalo, federal officials complained yesterday that aviation regulators for years have ignored their demand for better de-icing protocols.

"We don't like the progress that's taken place right now," said National Transportation Safety Board member Steve Chealander.

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Following a 1994 crash of a similar-type turboprop plane that killed 68 people, the board asked for increased research into de-icing systems and revised requirements for aircraft certification.

They also demanded that the Federal Aviation Administration order de-icing mechanisms like that aboard Continental Connection Flight 3407 to be activated immediately upon a plane encountering icy conditions.

But the NTSB says none of those changes has gone into effect because federal aviation regulators are dragging their feet.

"The pace of the FAA's activities in response to these recommendations remains unacceptably slow," Chealander testified before a Senate committee last April.

The NTSB increased its focus on de-icing systems after an investigation into the Oct. 31, 1994, crash of an American Eagle ATR 72 in Roselawn, Ind.

The FAA says it has acted to address the ice issue since the Indiana crash.

"Those initiatives have resulted in a steady reduction in accidents related to icing," the agency said.

But attorney Jim Kreindler, an expert in air disasters, said that if ice is determined to have caused the Buffalo disaster, then the lesson of the 1994 tragedy "has not been learned."

Investigators have not ruled out other causes, but are looking at the plane's de-icing system, which Chealander described as "very sophisticated."

Meanwhile, three men, including a teen, were arrested for trying to enter the Clarence crash site.

Thomas Woodman, 19, was found videotaping the area Friday, and an apparently intoxicated Paul Brenton, 63, was arrested as he allegedly tried to enter the site. Also Donald Krawczyk, 51, approached a roadblock in his car and was charged with DWI. *With AP*

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GRIM SCENE: Firefighters in upstate Clarence monitor the site of the Continental Connection Flight 3407 crash, in which icing is being eyed as the primary cause.

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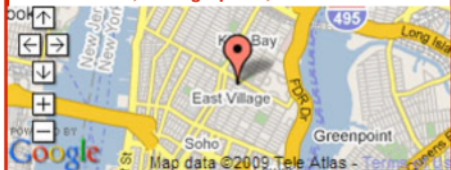
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