



DUTCH
SAFETY BOARD

Introduction

After the crash of flight MH17, it was important for the relatives of the occupants to gain clarity about the fate of their loved ones as quickly as possible. However, it turned out that not all of the necessary information was available immediately.

In the case of earlier aviation accidents, similar problems arose. Therefore, the Dutch Safety Board was surprised when it turned out that the Dutch crisis organisation had not been able to learn lessons from these earlier incidents and was incapable of responding quickly and adequately to the crash of flight MH17. Nobody took the responsibility for coordinating activities, and the parties involved worked without communicating with each other. Partly because of this, it took two to four days for the relatives of the 193 Dutch victims on board flight MH17 to receive confirmation from the Dutch authorities.

Tjibbe Joustra, chairman
Dutch Safety Board



MH17

MH17 passenger information

The crash of flight MH17

On 17 July 2014, the aeroplane of flight MH17 crashed in the eastern part of Ukraine. In the Netherlands, the first reports about the crash appeared in the media around 17.00 local time. Not much later, Malaysia Airlines confirmed that flight MH17 was involved, which had departed earlier that day from Amsterdam Airport Schiphol for Kuala Lumpur. Many relatives gathered at Schiphol in the hope of gaining more information.

The investigation

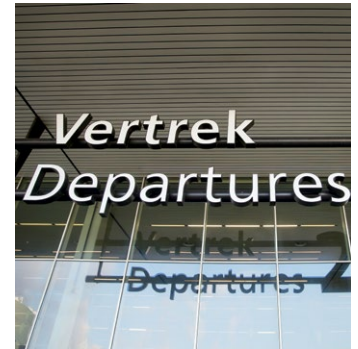
The fact that passenger information was not available immediately after the crash was reason for the Dutch Safety Board to conduct an investigation. In the context of that investigation it was examined what passenger information was available at the

airline and how it can be explained that the information about the passengers could not be obtained from the systems directly. In addition, it was examined which steps were taken between the crash of flight MH17 and the moment when the relatives of the Dutch passengers were informed by the authorities. How can the fact that this took two to four days be explained?

Conclusion

The relatives of Dutch victims of the crash of flight MH17 had to wait an unnecessarily long period of time for formal confirmation by the authorities about the fate of their loved ones. The information gathered by different parties about the victims and their relatives was not combined, as a result of which it took too long before a

Passenger information	3
From passenger list to relatives	4
Recommendations	7
About the Dutch Safety Board	8
Credits	8



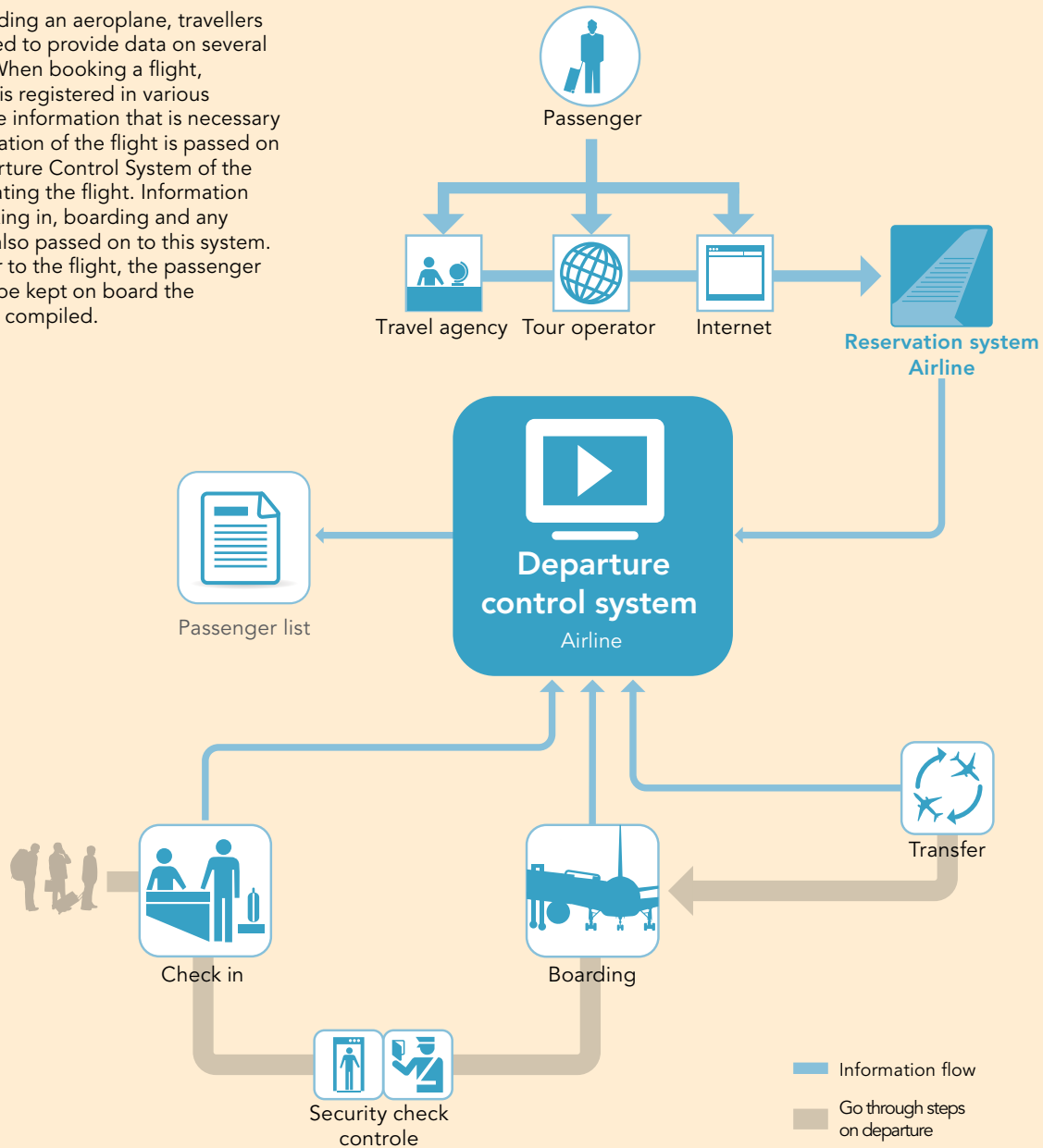
single, complete list was available. The Dutch authorities lacked management and coordination with respect to compiling the information.

MH17 investigations

In addition to the investigation into the availability of passenger information, the Dutch Safety Board also investigated the causes of the crash, the flight route of flight MH17 on 17 July 2014, and the decision-making processes concerning flight routes over conflict areas. All investigations were published at the same time and can be found on the website of the Dutch Safety Board.

The flow of passenger information, from booking to departure

Before boarding an aeroplane, travellers are requested to provide data on several occasions. When booking a flight, information is registered in various systems. The information that is necessary for the operation of the flight is passed on to the Departure Control System of the airline operating the flight. Information about checking in, boarding and any transfers is also passed on to this system. Shortly prior to the flight, the passenger list that will be kept on board the aeroplane is compiled.



Passenger information

What is information used for?

Handling at Schiphol

Malaysia Airlines was the airline responsible for the operation of the flight. Part of that was the handling at Schiphol, including the checking in and boarding of passengers and the processing of baggage. When handling the flight, Malaysia Airlines used the Departure Control System to register who had booked a ticket, which travellers had checked in, and which travellers had gone through the boarding process and were actually on board the aeroplane.

API information

A number of countries require the registration of specific information about travellers, so-called Advance Passenger Information (API). This information is used to improve border control and to be better

able to combat illegal immigration. Which information must be gathered varies per country, from passport data to place of residence. For flight MH17 as well, API data were gathered for various passengers, including the passengers whose final destination was Australia. For other passengers, it was not required to gather this API information.

Passenger list

Prior to the departure of the flight, a passenger list was generated by Malaysia Airlines based on the information in the Departure Control System. The passenger list of flight MH17 listed the name, gender, check-in number and seat number of the passengers.

Availability of information

Gathering information at various moments prior to the flight raises the expectation that the airline has all of this information at its disposal and that in case of an emergency it can be quickly retrieved from the systems. This is not the case. The fact that all relevant information about the passengers was not available at the push of a button after the crash of MH17 was due to the way in which the registration of passenger information in civil aviation is organised in general.

- When booking, reserving and handling a flight, passenger information is recorded and distributed to various registration systems and databases of various organisations, including travel organisations. Not all of these systems are accessible by the airline (at least not immediately).
- At the time of departure, the Departure Control System contains the most recent information about the travellers on board the aeroplane. At this point, however, only the information that is necessary for flight handling is entered. As a result, the other data that could be important after an accident are 'left behind' in the different systems.
- There is no uniformity with respect to recording passenger information: more information may be available

about one passenger than about another. Airlines are not obliged to register information from the passports of all passengers. Only for passengers who are travelling to an API country the airline is required to comply with the API requirements.

- Passenger data are not verified until check-in. At the airport of departure, the airline will verify part of the registered data, depending on the destination.
- For determining the identity of the passengers and tracking down their family members, the passenger list alone is insufficient. The passenger list may be incomplete or incorrect because of, for example, spelling errors.

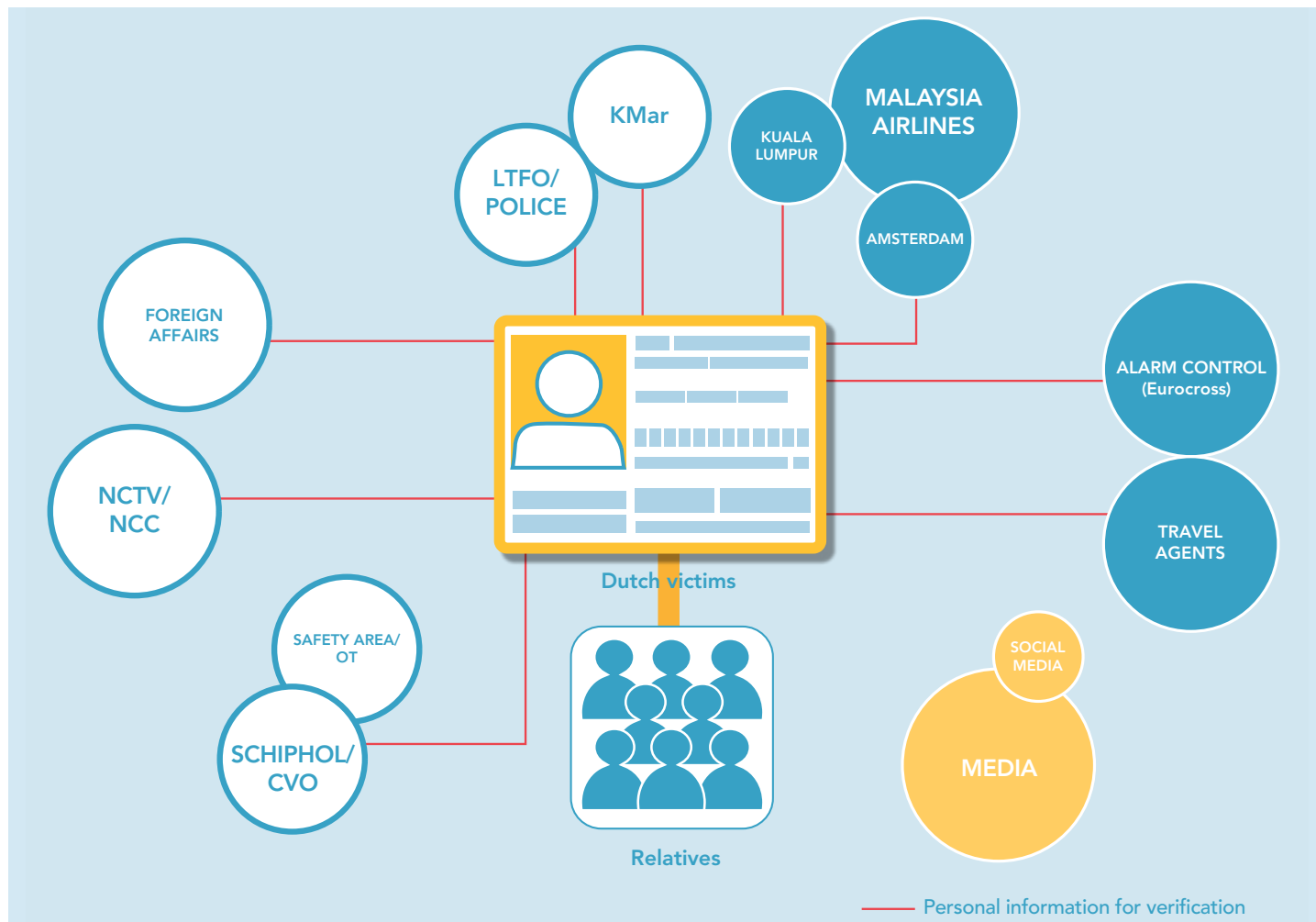
Interpretation of the task of the national authorities

The Dutch authorities have an important task with regard to the provision of information to Dutch relatives and the formal confirmation that their loved ones were on board the aeroplane. In the case of the

crash of flight MH17, it was mainly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) who bore this responsibility. It was up to them to gather and verify information that the police could then use to inform the relatives. However, the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs restricted itself to its own procedures, frameworks, and usual network. The NCTV did not take charge, even though the situation did call to do so. Because of this, there was no central point where the available information was gathered, verified and mutually coordinated. As a result there

was no single up-to-date and authoritative passenger list that all the parties could use to do their work. Neither did the Dutch national authorities allow Malaysia Airlines to contribute actively, even though a great deal of information was available there.



Parties that gathered or communicated information about victims and/or survivors.



Informing relatives

The Dutch authorities involved and Malaysia Airlines had not come to any agreements regarding how and when they would inform relatives about the victims on board the aeroplane. Malaysia Airlines published the passenger list while the relatives had not yet received formal confirmation from the authorities. The Dutch Safety Board finds this an understandable decision, because at that time there was already much information (some of it unconfirmed) about possible victims circulating on the internet.

The Dutch authorities initially sought for completeness of information with regard to all victims before starting to inform relatives. This is one of the

reasons why it took two to four days before relatives received confirmation. The Dutch Safety Board is of the opinion, however, that relatives are entitled to information about the fate of their loved ones as soon as this is available.

Conclusions of the investigation into passenger information

- The Dutch Safety Board is of the opinion that it should be possible for the authorities to inform relatives about an aeroplane accident within

48 hours after its occurrence (barring exceptional personal circumstances).

- The employees of the relevant organisations did their utmost to gather and verify information pertaining to the passengers and their relatives. Despite these efforts, in the case of MH17 the authorities were unable to provide all relatives of Dutch victims with a formal confirmation of the fate of their loved ones within two days.
- Because the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism did not take charge and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not sufficiently seek to coordinate with the other parties involved, the information that various parties gathered about the victims and their relatives was not combined. Consequently, it took an unnecessarily long time for a definite list to become available.

Relatives' perceptions

Relatives experienced the lack of coordinated information provision during the first few days after the crash as emotionally stressful. Even though various information numbers were opened, none of them were able to provide the information they needed. For the relatives, it was unclear where they could go best for information about their loved ones. From Saturday afternoon on, family liaison officers of the National Police contacted the first relatives

whose details were known to the police. It was not until the following Monday that all relatives had been contacted. Most of the relatives view the moment when the family liaison officers contacted them as the time when they were given formal confirmation that their loved ones were on board the aeroplane. For many relatives, the deployment of family liaison officers was a positive turning point in the process of information provision.

Recommendations

In order to improve and expedite the process of informing relatives, the Board believes that the following matters are important.

Recording nationality data

The Board finds it desirable that, in future, the nationalities of the passengers be recorded on the list that is available to the airline.

The Board therefore makes the following recommendation to the Minister of Infrastructure and the Environment:

In the international context, take initiatives to incorporate the registration of the nationality of airline passengers in international regulations. In the meantime, encourage operators to record the nationality of each passenger travelling to or from a Dutch airport in the systems that provide passenger information in case of an accident.

Improving the process of gathering, distributing and verifying passenger information and the provision of information to the relatives

In the Board's opinion, the NCTV should have been in charge of the entire process, so that it would have been more efficient.

The Board therefore makes the following recommendation to the Minister of Security and Justice:

Establish that, in case of accidents abroad (including aviation accidents) with many Dutch victims, the NCTV controls the overall process of collecting and verifying passenger information. Make sure that it is

clear to other relevant organisations that the NCTV is in charge, and what this means for everyone's duties, responsibilities and authorities within that process.

Simplification of the Dutch crisis organisation

In the Board's opinion, the Dutch crisis organisation is too complex. It is therefore necessary to examine the Dutch crisis organisation in order to see what is needed to have it function more effectively. This can and should involve learning as much as possible from other crises and the evaluations thereof.

The Board therefore makes the following recommendation to the Minister of Security and Justice:

Include the lessons learned from this investigation in the plans for improvement, simplification and flexibilisation of crisis management. Make sure that unambiguous control and overruling power form part thereof.

More information

The report entitled 'MH17 Passenger Information' contains all findings of the investigation into the passenger lists and the provision of information to the relatives. This report is available on the Dutch Safety Board's website.



About the Dutch Safety Board

It has been laid down in Dutch law that the Dutch Safety Board can investigate serious incidents and disasters. Its explicit objective is to establish what has happened based on a factual investigation, in order to prevent similar incidents or disasters from happening in future.

In order to provide its investigators with access to all relevant information, the Dutch Safety Board has extensive legal powers to gather such information. Investigators are allowed to enter areas, have the power to seize records and goods, and are able to let an area where an accident took place be closed off for the investigation. As the Dutch Safety Board's investigations never involve matters of blame or liability, they are conducted independently from any criminal investigations.

With international occurrences the Dutch Safety Board investigates according to relevant international laws or treaties.

In order to prevent unwanted interference in its investigations, the Board is independent. Even though the organisation is funded from the central government's budget, neither ministers nor any other persons or bodies can demand access, or give their judgement about investigation's findings or source materials. This enables the Board to reach its own conclusions on the causes of a major incident and determine independently which lessons should be learnt from it.

The Dutch Safety Board is a so-called 'multi-modal' board and has legal authority for conducting investigations in nearly all fields. Well-known

examples would be aviation, rail traffic and shipping, but the Board also investigates incidents in the chemical and petrochemical industries, at the armed forces, in the construction sector, in the food industry, in healthcare and with regard to road traffic. Occasionally, the Board will apply its expertise and legal powers to conduct investigations of a more incidental nature in other sectors in response to a serious incident. For example, the Board has investigated digital safety at government organisations, the decision making process on gas extraction in Groningen and the safety of asylum seekers who reside in the Netherlands.

The Board employs circa seventy people, including about forty investigators. Because of the Board's multi-modal nature, they are able to compare developments in the various sectors and apply that knowledge in their investigations as well as the recommendations they make in order to enhance safety in the Netherlands and beyond.

More information about the Dutch Safety Board:

www.safetyboard.nl



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Credits

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