QATAR AIRWAYS FIRES PILOTS RESPONSIBLE FOR MIAMI ACCIDENT

News / Airlines

By Lucky

Last September I wrote about the Qatar Airways accident (at least that's how the FAA categorized it) at Miami Airport. During this incident, a Qatar Airways 777-300ER bound for Doha didn't take off in time and struck some of the landing lights on the far end of the runway.

Qatar 777

Image not found or type unknown

This caused substantial damage (including a 46cm tear in the fuselage and 90 dents and scratches), though as it turns out the pilots didn't realize they had struck anything, so they continued flying to Doha. It's extremely fortunate that the plane landed without incident, as things could have ended *much* worse.

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It was quickly revealed that the Qatar Airways pilots made a midfield takeoff, where they took off from intersection “T1,” instead of doing a full length takeoff, like they were supposed to. If you look at the bottom of the diagram below, you’ll see the airport’s south runway, which they took off on. They were taking off into the east, and the first grey box is where they started their takeoff roll (instead of the end of the runway), and then the second grey box is where they ended up hitting the runway lights.

MIA-Airport

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As I wrote about in December, this incident was caused by confusion and miscommunication on the part of the pilots. Before the flight, they were given a temporary performance advisory for the runway on which they were taking off, which was named “Runway 09#T1.”

When they went to takeoff they used intersection “T1” for takeoff, which was a huge mistake. They made this mistake because they recalled hearing “T1” before, though the context was completely

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different. There was some confusion in the cockpit, though they continued with the takeoff anyway.

They're very fortunate nothing worse happened, though it's rather pathetic that Qatar Airways' CEO brushed off the incident at the time, claiming that "such kinds of incidents happen quite often." No, Akbar, I don't think a plane colliding with the runway lights and flying with 90 dents and scratches for 14 hours without the pilots knowing is something which "happens quite often."

And that's a bit concerning, because it makes you wonder what kind of safety policies the airline has when they don't view an incident like this as being serious.

The Sydney Morning Herald recently sat down with Al Baker, given the airline just launched flights between Doha and Sydney. They brought up the Miami incident to him, since airline safety is of course something which is very important to passengers. Here's what he had to say:

Mr Al Baker on Thursday reiterated "runway overruns happen very often in airports". But he said passengers could rest assured the Miami incident was the "first and last" time it would happen at his airline. "At no time was there any harm or any major safety issue for the aircraft and its passengers," he said, emphasising the plane landed safely.

The safety message became a little muddled when he was asked to explain why all of the pilots on the flight deck that day had been sacked.

"At Qatar Airways we will not accept any kind of lapses by pilots because they have hundreds of passengers whom they risked," he said. "[The pilot flying] was not asked to leave because he did anything by putting passengers at risk. What he did was he violated the company regulations on takeoff distance required by an aircraft, especially with the weight he was carrying on that aircraft."

So Al Baker still isn't acknowledging the severity of the issue, or the fact that things could have ended a lot worse.

But instead he's playing a word game here. The pilots weren't fired because they flew the plane unsafely, but rather because they violated the company's regulations on takeoff distance required by an aircraft.

That's the same thing!

What does Qatar Airways base their regulations around regarding takeoff distances required by an aircraft? Isn't it based on the *safe* distance required?

Bottom line

It's pathetic that Qatar Airways isn't acknowledging the severity of the incident. Though perhaps they're just trying to save face, and are in fact taking it seriously, based on the fact that they sacked the pilots (or maybe they're just doing that so they can shift blame). Regardless, claiming no one was at risk is a gross exaggeration, as multiple airline pilots have chimed in on this and indicated that the situation could have ended a lot worse.

I'd much rather an airline leader acknowledge something went wrong (no matter how severe it is) and explain what's being done to fix it, rather than brush something under the rug and pretend it wasn't a big deal.

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