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Cork plane crash third fatal incident for Fairchild Metroliner plane

- US-made plane has been involved in number of fatal accidents
- Investigation into crash will focus on possibility of pilot error

Dan Milmoguardian.co.uk, Thursday 10 February 2011 17.24 GMT

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The Fairchild Metroliner, a US-built plane popular with regional carriers, has been involved in a number of fatal accidents since its 1970s debut.

According to the Ascend consultancy, 138 passengers and 70 crew have died in the 19-seater since 1975 – with Cork the third fatal crash in five years. The number of fatalities is not thought alarming for a plane with such a long service record, including 439 still in service.

The worst year for the aeroplane was 1988, when seven incidents accounted for 48 casualties. The worst crash occurred in Germany, where 21 passengers and crew died after a plane operated by Nürnberger Flugdienst tried to land in a storm. A lightning strike might have affected electrical systems.

The Cork investigation will examine the possibility of pilot error playing a significant role in the crash as the pilots had already attempted two landings in fog.

The crash comes amid signs that aviation safety, which has been improving since the 1990s, is stalling. The global death toll from air crashes rose by 13% to 828 last year as the fatal accident rate worsened from one in 1.5m flights in 2009 to one in 1.3m in 2010. Ascend said aircraft insurance claims had reached their highest total, \$1.1bn (£685m).

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