



Aviation Week

September 21, 2009

CORRESPONDENCE

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A BLACK BOX IN EVERY SEAT

On June 1, an Airbus A330 went down in the Atlantic. Due to the depth of the ocean and the rough undersea terrain, the flight data recorder (FDR) will probably never be recovered. Already, calls are going out throughout government and industry to institute technology to transmit FDR data from aircraft via satellite or other uplink. Before we launch satellites and fit aircraft with costly, high-bandwidth, real-time uplink systems, let us consider another option. That A330 was probably equipped with a digital inflight entertainment system capable of transmitting hundreds of megabits per second to every seat on the plane. And each seat probably had dozens of megabytes of extra storage available for use as a buffer. By installing a simple repeater and adding a few lines of code into the inflight entertainment system, we could turn every seat on a plane into a mirror image of the "black box" FDR. It is a low-cost solution that requires no space or weight. And while no individual seat is likely to survive a disaster, it is also the rare disaster that destroys every seat.

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