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NTSB to question Flight 800 workers

■ **INVESTIGATION:** Some people were surprised the group has not talked to any service crew members

By Pat Milton
The Associated Press

SMITHTOWN, N.Y. — More than four months after TWA Flight 800 exploded, the National Transportation Safety Board has yet to interview anyone who serviced the jet before it took off.

The FBI, however, began around-the-clock interviews within 48 hours of the July 17 crash — questioning hundreds of maintenance workers, baggage handlers and mechanics, focusing on the possibility of terrorism or sabotage.

NTSB spokesman Alan Pollock said Sunday that the safety board waited to question ground crews because it "needed time to understand more about the accident."

"Now we know more precisely what questions to ask," Pollock said. "When an accident happens in the morning, our society wants answers by the 11 o'clock news. The NTSB doesn't work that way. We are methodical, focused and

very patient."

The FBI interviews were conducted at New York's Kennedy International Airport, where the Paris-bound plane departed from minutes before the explosion. Others were interviewed in Athens, Greece, where the flight had originated.

NTSB investigators were invited to conduct dual interviews with the FBI at the time, but they "chose not to participate," according to one criminal investigator who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The source noted that NTSB did provide a few questions to be asked during the interviews relating to mechanical procedures.

The safety board's delay in questioning those with the most knowledge about the aircraft's last moments on the ground surprised a former accident investigator.

"If they haven't questioned anyone as of yet, I find that highly unusual," said Barry Trotter, a former NTSB senior investigator. "You want to get in there right away and talk to anyone who touched that airplane."

"The only reason not to do it that I can see would be if it was a

bomb," he said, adding that even in that case it is surprising that investigators would risk allowing memories to fade.

Initially, nearly everyone including most of the NTSB staff believed a bomb or missile must have brought down the plane, killing all 230 aboard.

But with about 95 percent of the plane recovered from the ocean floor, investigators say mechanical malfunction is becoming more likely, especially in the absence of any proof of a bomb or a missile. No scenario, however, has been ruled out as crews continue to trawl the ocean depths for more pieces of wreckage.

The transcripts of the FBI interviews were turned over to the NTSB last week. Accident investigators are currently reviewing them, Pollock said.

"Initially, the FBI interviews sufficed for the initial part of the investigation," he said. "We have questions we want to go back and ask a few of those people."

Pollock said the NTSB would begin its questioning of ground crews soon, but he would not give an exact date.

Thanksgiving Square forum for gratitude

The spirit of the Thanksgiving holiday begins today in EMU Cedar Room A.

The "Thanksgiving Square" will be open from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. for students to express their gratitude in a private, non-denominational manner.

Organizers say the event is

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brevity

meant to be a common ground for people to join in thanking whatever they consider their higher power to be.

There is no set format for the event. Organizers say they only

ask that prayers do not distract others.

Participants will be given index cards on which they can write their Thanksgiving inspiration. The cards will then be available for others to read.

The "Thanksgiving Square" is based on an old-fashioned town square, established in Dallas, TX, about 20 years ago.

—compiled by Kristin Bailey



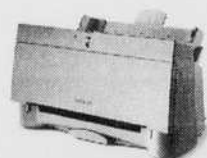
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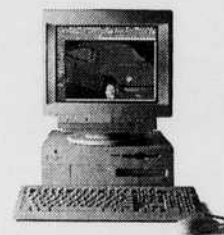
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