

New robot to search for clues in EgyptAir crash

By Denise Lavoie
The Associated Press

NEWPORT, R.I. — A tougher, nimbler underwater robot with a seven-jointed titanium arm was lowered into the sea Monday to find the black boxes that may answer what doomed EgyptAir Flight 990.

Searchers hoped the Magnum would succeed where another robot, the Deep Drone, failed after exploring the murky, sunless depths for over two days.

More than a week after the plane plunged from 33,000 feet and killed all 217 people aboard, the cockpit voice and flight data recorders that could hold the most complete picture of what went wrong remained 270 feet beneath the Atlantic.

The black boxes are amid wreckage, and whenever a piece of it is moved, sediment gets stirred up and obscures visibility.

Investigators are looking into all possibilities, including mechanical failure, human error and sabotage.

Many grieving relatives left for home after a memorial service on the rocky shore Sunday. Many expressed frustration because they were leaving without answers about the cause of the crash.

"I feel like they could be doing more," said Rhonda Dawoud, a resident of Woodbridge, Va., who lost her cousin in the tragedy.

Family members were also left knowing they may never be able to retrieve the remains of their loved ones, which have yet to be identi-

fied because they are in fragments.

"Of course, the information we want to know is about human remains, and they don't have answers for us," said Ina Abdrabu, a legal assistant from Los Angeles who lost her husband, a nephew and a grand-nephew in the crash.

Rhode Island's attorney general filed a petition Monday in court seeking authority to issue certificates declaring that the crash victims are presumed dead. Family members have requested such a measure to begin clearing up legal matters.

The Magnum has a seven-jointed arm that can be manipulated from its ship to grasp the recorders. It also has a cage that protects it from the heavy seas.

The civilian salvage ship Car-

olyn Chouest, which carries the Magnum, can also withstand rougher conditions than the USS Grapple, which carried Deep Drone, because the Carolyn Chouest can float in a fixed spot without dropping anchor.

Both the Deep Drone and the Magnum are remote-controlled underwater vessels about the size of a minivan.

Investigators said it is too dangerous to send divers to get the black boxes. The divers' air hoses could get severed or tangled in the wreckage. Also, the water is so deep that divers can stay down for only 30 minutes and must then spend four hours decompressing.

If the investigators cannot retrieve the recorders, they could seek digital computers on the air-

craft's two engines.

The Pratt & Whitney engines on the Boeing 767 are each equipped with computers that communicate commands from the cockpit to the engine. Although those computers record some information, mostly for maintenance purposes, they are not built to survive crashes and do not contain the scope of data held by the flight data recorder.

"They have not played a large role in previous crash investigations," said Mark Sullivan, spokesman for Pratt & Whitney.

All wreckage is being treated as evidence in case the disaster turns out to be the result of a crime. All the pieces are being tagged and secured by FBI and National Transportation Safety Board personnel working side-by-side on boats.

Officials say hazardous waste control uncertain in 2000

PORTLAND — Worried if the milk will stay fresh through the turning of the new millennium? Don't, says Fred Meyer stores — they store up to 25,000 pounds of ammonia, a corrosive liquefied gas, to refrigerate its Portland dairy.

But that brings up another problem.

The giant supermarket chain is not the only company in the metropolitan area that makes, stores, distributes, uses and discards hazardous waste in large amounts.

Boise Cascade keeps as much as 720,000 pounds of chlorine, a corrosive gas, to bleach pulp at its St. Helen's pulp-and-paper mill.

And SEH America Inc. stores up to 46,000 pounds of hydrogen chloride, a corrosive liquefied gas, to make the wafers that become computer chips.

The problem is that no one — not the government, the public or even the industries themselves — knows for sure how many of these and other facilities are vulnerable to Y2K problems.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in August warned companies that the Y2K computer bug could lead to the accidental release of hazardous chemicals and other pollutants into the air, water and soil.

And according to the Interna-

tional Association of Fire Fighters, the hazardous materials industry is the real wild card of Y2K.

"It's a bunch of hype," said the operator of a small Portland company that makes cleaning and sanitation supplies. Of his own business, he said: "It's all under control."

In contrast, a small chemical manufacturer in Tualatin has installed new Y2K-compliant equipment with manual overrides in case of computer or power failure.

Noting that one of the company's PCs crashed when its date was rolled forward to 2000, the president says of his doubting industry peers: "They may be in for a surprise."

At the other extreme are large, investor-owned companies such as Elf Atochem North America Inc., which zaps table salt and water into a variety of chemicals at its downtown Portland plant.

The company's Y2K team has identified and replaced all embedded chips that had date functions. The team also will have tested all computer systems three times by the end of the year and will put all but two manufacturing processes on standby into 2000.

But the majority of Oregon's chemical handlers are private businesses, and that makes the task of assessing the industry's overall readiness difficult.

In the Portland area alone, there are more than 3,000 facilities that emit pollution or handle hazardous waste, and 125 or so businesses that keep large quantities of gaseous and liquid ammonia on hand.

Chemical Distributors Inc., which operates warehouses is one small company that finished its Y2K work in mid-1999.

President Donald J. Cruickshank says now that the company would have run into computer trouble if it hadn't made the Y2K fixes. He admits still worrying a tiny bit about whether the railroads will be able to deliver his inventory.

The Associated Press

Drug-related deaths to reach record high

PORTLAND — Oregon's drug-related deaths for the first nine months of 1999 are up 28 percent from last year and are on track to set a new record, according to state figures released Monday.

In the first nine months, 206 people died from drug-related causes, compared with 161 in the same period last year.

The upward spiral began in 1991, said Dr. Karen Gunson, state medical examiner. She predicts that more than 300 people will die this year in Oregon from drug-related causes.

"This is a message to the people who would legalize drugs: It's not harmless" said John Horton, a Multnomah County deputy district attorney who prosecutes drug cases. "People really are dying."

Heroin continues to be the leading killer with 163 through September, a 34 percent increase from last year.

The main source is black tar heroin imported from Mexico, said Mike Kuhlman, assistant special agent in charge of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's district office in Portland.

He said the drug's use is on the rise, especially in Eugene, Salem and Portland. And some of what is landing in Oregon is stronger because it's not being cut as much, possibly contributing to the death rate, he said.

"It appears that it's not changing hands as often as it otherwise would," Kuhlman said.

Fifty-nine people died from cocaine-related causes, an increase of 38 percent over the same period last year. And, meth-related deaths jumped 29 percent to 40. Drugs used in combination caused 49 deaths, up 29 percent.

The Associated Press

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CRIME WATCH

Reported from Oct. 30 through Nov. 7:

- Oct. 30: Criminal Trespass I, 1500 block of Alder Street, items stolen.
- Oct. 30: Sex Abuse II, 1800 block of Harris Street, woman assaulted.
- Nov. 2: Assault IV/Harassment,

north end of Autzen Footbridge, individuals arrested.

■ Nov. 5: Criminal Mischief II, Criminal Trespass II, 1300 block of University Street, items stolen.

■ Nov. 6: Physical Harassment, Kincaid and East 13th Avenue, woman harassed.

■ Nov. 6: Criminal Mischief, 500 block East 15th Avenue, keying patrol car.

■ Nov. 7: Disorderly Conduct, 1000 block of Alder Street, fighting with public safety officer.

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