

MP495 crash – Martinair 767-pilot saw flames from the DC-10 as it landed

DEATH COUNT ESTIMATED AT ABOUT 90 IN SOUTHERN PORTUGAL PLANE CRASH

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Up to 90 people were killed when a DC-10 charter plane carrying more than 320 Dutch vacationers crashed in flames Monday at Faro in southern Portugal, an official said.

Scores of people were injured when the three-engine jet caught fire on its second attempt to land in heavy rain. Airport officials said one of the engines hit the tarmac, causing an explosion.

The flight data recorder has been found. Joaquim Ferreira do Amaral, transport minister, said on television from Faro that the "black box," which contains recordings of the last communications between the pilot and the control tower, had been found in the plane's wreckage.

Radio reporters said the Martinair DC-10 exploded in a ball of flames. They quoted witnesses as saying passengers poured out of every available exit and hole in the aircraft's fuselage.

Television pictures showed the blackened and twisted wreckage of the gutted plane lying on its side, smoke billowing.

Martinair said in Amsterdam that the DC-10 had been carrying 327 passengers - including 12 children and eight babies - and a crew of 13.

An official at the Faro municipality said a total of 80 or 90 people were killed. She said rescuers, hampered by the rain, were still trying to free charred bodies from the shattered airliner three hours after the crash.

The number of injured was not clear although all reports said it was high. Before the Faro official gave the latest death toll, the Portuguese Health Ministry put the figure of those hurt at more than 280.

The ministry said most of those were in Faro hospital. But 18 people with more severe injuries were taken by air to hospitals in Lisbon and Coimbra.

The captain of a Martinair Boeing 767 that touched down at Faro just before the crash reported seeing flames coming from the DC-10 as it landed.

"The captain of the 767, Frans Charbon, saw fire on the left-hand side of the plane," said Udo Buys, Martinair spokesman, in Amsterdam.

He told reporters Martinair was still compiling a full list of the dead and injured and could not give any details at present.

Officials said it was the first major crash at Faro Airport, which opened in 1967.