Kenner mayor seeks tighter FAA controls

KENNER (UPI) — The city’s mayor, angry over the Federal Aviation Administration’s handling of a “close call” with a low-flying Eastern Airlines jet, Monday called on the FAA to implement stricter regulations.

Eastern Airlines Flight 911 lifted off from New Orleans International Airport so low Oct. 3 that blasts from its engines and exhaust snapped tree limbs and knocked a woman at a nearby store to the ground.

Mayor Aaron Broussard said he is dissatisfied with the FAA’s investigation of the matter and has plans to call on Louisiana’s congressional delegation and local officials to pressure the agency into tightening airline regulations.

Robert Hooks, a spokesman in the FAA’s Dallas office, said the agency had found no indication that the Boeing 727-225 had violated any regulations.

“Everything looks good to me,” Hooks said. “That is what appalled me,” Broussard said. “It did not appall me that we had a . . . ‘close call’ in Kenner.” I have been raised in Kenner. I grew up under the east-west runway. I could see the faces of passengers as they flew over my house as a child.

“Low-flying planes, unfortunately, are common in Kenner and . . . most shockingly they are apparently legal.”

Hooks said the plane, en route to Cancun, Mexico, with 112 people aboard, did not violate weight regulations, even though it carried just 2,915 pounds less than the maximum takeoff weight allowed.

The plane lifted off from the airport with a 3-knot tail wind, officials said. As it left the ground at the tip of the east-west runway, thrusts from the engines and exhaust blew dirt and debris over a nearby automobile approach to the airport.

The blasts of wind also knocked down Suzette Davis, a customer at the Airline Quick Stop grocery store about 550 yards from the end of the runway, and snapped limbs off a 25-foot pine tree in the store’s parking lot. Witnesses at the store claimed the plane could not have been bigger than a foot when it flew over the business.

By early Monday, the FAA had not been able to determine whether the jet violated regulations. Broussard said he plans to contact Louisiana’s congressional delegation, and he urged the public and officials from Jefferson, Orleans and St. Charles parishes to follow suit. He said he hopes the pressure will force the FAA to stiffen airline regulations.

“I’ve had one too many accidents happen in the city of Kenner. I don’t want any more,” Broussard said, apparently referring to the crash of a Pan American World Airways jetliner in a Kenner neighborhood July 9, 1982. That crash killed 146 on the plane and eight on the ground.

“The FAA, if it’s going to tell me that what that plane did is legal, I say the FAA is wrong,” the mayor said. “We’ve got to come out with stricter and tighter enforcement.”

The low-flying Eastern jetliner was the same model as the Pan Am craft that crashed in Kenner 16 months ago. Federal investigators said in the 1982 crash a vertical windshear — a violent shift in wind speed and direction — struck the plane during takeoff in a thunderstorm hurling the craft to the ground.