Winds, Almost Capacity Payload Cited In Crash

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impeded lift-off in adverse conditions,” the newspaper said.

There was no evidence of human error in the control tower, the newspaper also quoted investigators as saying, and — although no one suggested it — it quoted Dunbar as saying no trace of alcohol, drugs or other chemicals were found in the bodies of crew members.

Like Dunbar, Vice Chairman Patricia Goldman and other NTSB spokesmen have consistently refused to speculate on the cause until the agency’s investigation was completed.

The NTSB, however, did officially suggest Tuesday — as a result of this investigation — that cockpit voice recorders now being used aboard commercial aircraft should be replaced within two years because they are technologically extinct.

The agency suggested, too, that the Federal Aviation Administration conduct random checks to learn whether the recorders now in use are working properly.

The suggestions very quickly followed the Monday discovery that the Pan Am cockpit tape was of such poor quality that FBI specialists were asked for help in enhancing them.

“It’s very difficult to get anything off of there, particularly after they turned the windshield wipers on,” said one NTSB official in Washington.

The board said, too, that the tape contains "background conversations which apparently came from the machine's failure to erase previous conversations ... sufficiently."

As federal investigators continued their work today, a funeral service was to be held at St. Catherine of Sienna in nearby Metairie for the wife and three young sons of Robert Giancontieri.

Sandy Giancontieri and her sons Robbie, 7; Ryan, 4, and Christopher, 4 months, were killed when Flight 759 slashed through their home, one of the first struck by the airliner. Her husband had left only 20 minutes earlier.

Still in the window of the Giancontieri home had been a sign — “It's a boy!” — that was placed there after Christopher's birth in April.

The Giancontieri funeral followed a Tuesday night religious observance 100 miles away in Baton Rouge for an Addis, La., family of seven Fitzgeralds who were flying Pan Am to attend a memorial service in Las Vegas.

“Tragedies bring us face to face with the uncertainties as well as the certainties of our life,” the Rev. Vernon Martindale told mourners at the Baton Rouge gathering.

Ms. Goldman also reiterated what she had said previously:

— that advisories about windshears were broadcast twice on two frequencies that surely would have been heard by Pan Am 759’s pilot “if he was listening.”

— that the cockpit voice recorder tapes, although of poor quality, should nonetheless give investigators a rough idea of what happened before, during and after takeoff.

— and that the plane’s three tail-mounted engines, weighing 5,600 pounds each, were en route by truck to New York’s John F. Kennedy Airport for closer scrutiny.

Dunbar said FBI sound experts were continuing to struggle with the cockpit tapes, and expected to have a rough transcript in about two weeks.

So far, only a 58-second segment of the cockpit tape has been received from the FBI, Dunbar said. Ms. Goldman said it provided no clues to the cause of the crash.

Federal investigators have refused to disclosed the contents of any tapes — either from the cockpit or the control tower.
KENNER, La. (AP) — The Pan American airliner crash that killed 154 likely was caused by a combination of violent winds and an almost capacity payload of passengers, baggage and fuel, a New Orleans newspaper said in a story today that quoted unidentified federal investigators.

“We don’t comment on that sort of thing,” Brad Dunbar, a National Transportation Safety Board spokesman, said when advised Tuesday night of the copyright report by The Times-Picayune, The States-Item.

It was the latest in a series of speculations following last Friday’s crash of Pan Am Flight 759 as it left New Orleans International Airport in a torrential rainstorm on a flight from Miami to San Diego, via New Orleans and Las Vegas.

The death toll aboard the plane was 146, including an unborn 7-month-old fetus added Tuesday by the Jefferson Parish coroner. Eight people on the ground also perished when the Boeing 727-200 slammed into a suburban New Orleans subdivision, destroying or heavily damaging more than a dozen homes.

It was the second deadliest accident in U.S. commercial aviation history.

Truck-mounted “cherry pickers” were being used today to more closely examine trees clipped by the Boeing 727 as it took off toward the east from the airport’s east-west runway. Investigators hoped to determine the angle of the plane’s descent.

Also, the first lawsuits stemming from the crash were filed Tuesday, asking a total of $88.5 million. (Continued on Page 6, Col. 1)