



Transport Accident
Investigation Commission

TAIC's purpose

"The principal purpose of the Transport Accident Investigation Commission (TAIC) shall be to determine the circumstances and causes of accidents and incidents with a view to avoiding similar occurrences in the future, rather than to ascribe blame to any person." TAIC Act 1990

Keeping survivors and families informed

This leaflet outlines the Commission's general approach to working with accident survivors and families during an inquiry. We recognise that victims and families suffer loss and distress, and have a deep personal interest in the progress of an inquiry. We also understand that survivors and the families of people who have died or been seriously injured want to know what happened, why and how a similar tragedy might be prevented. These are the questions the Commission's inquiry seeks to answer.

TAIC's commitment to survivors and families

We are committed to:

- Treating survivors and families with care and compassion – respecting privacy, diversity of family structures, and acknowledging cultural and language preferences, where practicable.
- Keeping survivors and families informed about general inquiry progress and giving advance notice of major announcements.

Who we communicate with

We invite next of kin or a family representative to provide details of other close family connections who would appreciate updates on the inquiry. We interpret "family" broadly.

We welcome direct approaches from people seeking inclusion on our updates if there is a communication problem within a family, however, we will need to validate the request.

How TAIC communicates

How we keep in contact during the inquiry depends on the circumstances of the accident, where people are, the number of people in similar circumstances and the stage of the inquiry.

At first we usually communicate face-to-face, or at families briefings, by phone, email or text message. If many people are involved, we may use other secure online tools. We do not use social media messaging for this purpose.

Beyond the early site investigation phase, email is our main communication tool.

If survivors or families are foreign citizens who live outside New Zealand, TAIC may need to communicate through one of our overseas peer agencies or the relevant consular office.

Soon after the accident we email a written summary of inquiry-related information we have released and advise when to expect the next update.

Our updates keep you informed about progress through the inquiry stages, upcoming major announcements and the laws we work under.

We take a 'no surprises' approach to keeping you informed – especially if a major announcement is due to be made.

No repeat accidents – ever!

Things TAIC can't do

There are strict legal constraints on what the Commission can and can't do during an inquiry. While this can be frustrating, there are sound reasons behind these limitations.

TAIC can't:

- Decide blame, liability, or guilt.
The Commission does not lay blame or prosecute people. Its reports usually do not name people involved in accidents or incidents; rather, they examine complex factors to explain what happened and why so that transport can be made safer.
- Share legally protected information.
The law promotes free and frank contributions to a TAIC investigation by preventing the general release of evidence or use for other purposes.
- Confirm or deny rumours.
The aftermath of an accident is too soon to talk about it with any certainty. The Commission's findings and recommendations rest on thorough analysis of evidence.
- Assist insurance or damages claims.
These matters should be dealt by the transport operator or their representative, or your own insurers.
- Offer practical or psychological assistance.
Other agencies provide advice or referral – e.g., Victim Support, ACC, funeral directors, lawyers, Police Family Liaison. Survivors or families who live outside New Zealand should approach their country's consular service.
- Comment on other investigations.
There may be other investigations into the same event, e.g., by the Coroner, Police, transport regulator or health and safety, insurance or environmental agencies. Each has their own legal mandate, purpose, methods and evidence.
- Define cause of death.
This is the Coroner's role.

Please note that the sole focus of the Commission's inquiry is the prevention of similar accidents and incidents in the future. It is completely separate from the provision of family assistance and/or welfare for next of kin.

When we'll contact you

Beyond the first few weeks, TAIC will be in contact with you on a six monthly basis or when the inquiry reaches significant milestones, including:

- release of draft report for consultation
- release of final report.

In a small number of inquiries, the Commission may release an interim factual report or urgent recommendations. In all cases, we notify survivors and families before public release.

While the Commission's inquiry continues, TAIC staff can only talk to you in general terms about processes and progress. This is because the TAIC Act prevents disclosure of evidence beyond what appears in TAIC reports.

The Commission takes the time necessary to produce a report that everyone can rely on – rarely less than a year. We are thorough in our fact finding and analysis.

Consultation on draft report

The Commission's report on the inquiry is produced only after confidential consultation on a draft report. Sometimes, the law prevents victims and families from being consulted on it. If the draft report states or infers that a person's conduct contributed to the circumstances or causes of the occurrence, then the Commission will give that person or their formal representative the opportunity to comment. The Commission is independent and impartial; its investigations are rigorous and open to checks and challenges throughout the consultation process and it seeks expert opinion and further investigative work when necessary.

Release of final report

The final report will be published on the TAIC website. We will give you advance notice – usually a week or so – and send a confidential, advance copy under appropriate security arrangements. We may also offer a briefing or opportunity for discussion.

Key contact

TAIC's Communications staff will be your key contact throughout the inquiry: comms@taic.org.nz

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