PERSONAL EFFECTS WAREHOUSE PROCESSING FOLLOWING A FIRE-INVOLVED AVIATION DISASTER: OBSERVATIONS FROM THE AI171 RESPONSE IN AHMEDABAD

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Abstract - Aviation disasters that involve post-crash fire create significant challenges for the recovery and processing of personal effects (PE). When a large commercial aircraft crashes in an urban area, the personal belongings of victims are often damaged by heat, contaminated by fire suppressants and fuel residue, and mixed with debris from the crash site. Managing these items in a systematic way is an important part of the overall disaster response, yet this aspect of mass fatality operations receives relatively little attention in published guidance. This paper describes the personal effects processing operation carried out at the Kenyon International warehouse facility established following the Air India Flight AI171 disaster in Ahmedabad, India, on 12 June 2025. The aircraft crashed into the hostel block of B.J. Medical College shortly after take-off, resulting in 260 fatalities and a large volume of fire-affected personal effects recovered from the site. At the warehouse, incoming PE bags were logged on arrival to maintain chain of custody records linked to the original recovery zones at the crash site. Items were sorted by type and condition before being assessed for decontamination and cleaning. Articles contaminated by jet fuel residue and fire suppressant foam required careful handling to avoid further damage. Once cleaned, each item was individually catalogued and documented to support the next-of-kin matching process, which was coordinated remotely through family liaison channels rather than through direct contact at the warehouse. The paper reflects on several practical challenges encountered during processing, including the handling of fire-damaged documents and valuables, the identification of items belonging to passengers from four different nationalities, and the management of articles that could not be immediately matched to a named passenger. It also notes the importance of staff welfare considerations given the nature of the work involved. The paper offers a basic operational account of PE warehouse processing in a fire-involved aviation mass fatality context, with the aim of contributing practical experience to the wider body of knowledge available to DVI and humanitarian response teams in the region.

Keywords - Aviation Disaster, Chain of Custody, Decontamination, Personal Effects Processing.