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It took search and rescue teams three days after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks to locate the black box from the airplane that struck the Pentagon, and they were never able to recover black boxes from the airplanes that hit the World Trade Center. As a result, important information about the attacks may have been lost forever.

With catastrophic situations such as that in mind, U.S. Rep. David Price introduced a bill Tuesday aimed at improving black box recording technology on new commercial airplanes.

The Safe Aviation Flight Enhancement, or SAFE, Act would change the current National Transportation Safety Board requirements for two separate black box systems -- a fixed cockpit voice recorder and a digital flight data recorder -- combining them into one system, located in two places. Each airplane would have a fixed combination system in the cockpit and a deployable combination system at the rear of the aircraft.

The deployable technology would allow the black box to separate from the airplane in an emergency to avoid fire and other hazards at the crash site, according to the 4th District Democratic congressman. Unlike black boxes now in use, the new ones would be designed to float and would contain more advanced transmitters to help search and rescue teams find the recorders.

Price said the Sept. 11 attacks rendered the improvements critical, though he has been working on enhancing aviation security for nearly a decade.

"Since 9/11, terrorism is a factor to consider," he said. "In a case where you're not sure why a plane went down, you need to be very, very quick about determining the reason."

When drafting the bill, Price consulted 9/11 Commission recommendations and a 2005 report from the Department of Homeland Security and FBI stating that commercial airlines remain susceptible to attack. But he said the inspiration to take on aviation security came from his close personal friend Jim Hall, former chairman of the NTSB.

Lauren Peduzzi, spokeswoman for the NTSB, which investigates every civil airplane accident in the United States, said black box "recorder improvements are on one of our most-wanted lists."

In 1999, the NTSB issued a list of recommendations to improve black box recorders, including installing cockpit voice recorders that could record for longer spans of time and had their own backup power in case of electrical failure.

"I hope we're not going to have to have another disaster for people to understand the need for this," Price said of the bill he cosponsored, "because it's pretty easy to imagine."

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