

Let me see if I have this right: Trees can't be in the path of an airport runway but people can?

Perhaps before the City fires up the Stihls and Homelites, they should research some facts about the safety record of American Eagle and learn something about airplane accidents in and near Cheyenne.

There are some with aviation backgrounds who believe the planes planned to be used by American Eagle are not the best for the high altitude, windy conditions of Cheyenne.

And, if the fawning Cheyenne officials want to continue to refer to American Eagle as American Airlines, let's include their crashes as well. Both are owned by AMR but are operated separately. Here are some of their crashes:

American Eagle ATR-72, Flight 4184 October 31, 1994 - Four crew, 64 passengers (all on board) were killed.

American Airlines DC10-10 Flight 191, May 25, 1979 - 258 passengers, 13 crew and two people on the ground were killed. No survivors.

American Eagle Fairchild Metro III, Flight 3378, February 19, 1988 - 10 passengers, two crew were killed. No survivors.

American Eagle CASA 212-200, Flight 5452, June 7, 1992 - Both crew and all three passengers were killed.

American Eagle Jetstream 31, Flight 3379, December 13, 1994 - Both crew and 13 of 18 passengers were killed.

American Airlines 757, Flight 965, December 20, 1995 - All eight crew and 155 or 159 passengers were killed.

American Airlines MD80, Flight 1120, June 1, 1999 - One of six crew, eight of 139 passengers killed.

American Airlines A300-600, Flight 587, November 12, 2001 - All nine crew members, 251 passengers and five on the ground were killed.

Two of the September 11, 2001 terrorist takeovers of airplanes involved American Airlines flights as did the Richard Reed "shoe bomber" incident.

In a six year period, from June 2003 - May 2009, American Eagle had 14 nonfatal "incidents," which included five "serious" injuries on five different flights, including a passenger's broken ankle, a flight attendant being knocked unconscious in the air, a ground personnel being hit by a propeller, a flight attendant having a beverage service cart fall onto her leg during turbulence, and a passenger receiving a serious injury during evacuation of a returning plane for which no emergency existed. There are also incidents without serious injury wherein American Eagle planes ran into other planes on the tarmac or runway or into employees on the tarmac.

The parent company of both American Airlines and American Eagle is AMR Corp. American Airlines does not own American Eagle. They are sister operations under the holding company, AMR. If was AMR that tried to divest itself of American Eagle in 2008, not American Airlines. That is hard for Cheyenne officials to understand because of the similarity of names. For them to continue to state that American Airlines will service Cheyenne when it is American Eagle is like them saying Cheyenne Frontier Days is owned by Frontier Refining. Similar names do not make one business the parent of another. Or even necessarily related to the other.

None of the approximately 20 "Fatal Plane Crashes and Significant Events Since 1970 for American Airlines and American Eagle" listed by **AirSafe.com** involved takeoffs. Just like none of the plane crashes with fatalities from the Cheyenne Airport, with the notable exception of the stunt flight of Jessica Dubroff, involved takeoffs. Most of the 20 listed plane crashes were on landings, one was in-flight from de-icing problems, and some were after successful takeoff without striking trees or other aircraft. Mechanical problems and structural failures contributed to some of the crashes.

Because almost all fatal commercial airline crashes are on approach or landing, safety should require the removal of all trees, parks, ballfields, houses and buildings on the landing path.

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Airplane takeoffs are inherently safe

As the story to the left indicates, almost all fatal plane crashes occur while in flight or on approach or landing. Almost none occur on takeoff. The safety record on takeoff is strikingly better than after takeoff and on landing.

Weather and daylight are contributing factors to crashes - both fatal and nonfatal.

But, trees well off the end of a runway have never proven an impediment to good pilots with well-maintained equipment to fly, taking off with reasonable loads.

In an internet search of "airplane crashes, Cheyenne," I reviewed a handful of accidents that go all the way back to the mid-40's. The most horrific of all plane crash fatalities was probably the one involving little Jessica Dubroff. We will never be able to escape being linked to that catastrophe. While someone at the airport agreed to be a participant in that ill-fated stunt is hard to fathom.

Jessica was barely more than a baby when overzealous, publicity-seeking parents set the innocent seven year-old girl on a path to her death. She did not make the decision to depart that morning. No 7 year-old could. An adult did and an adult was at the controls, you can bet on it.

I can remember that morning too well. It was raining very hard and I was in my car on the way to my office when I heard the news on the radio. Right away, I knew the bulletin was about her. It was bad weather to be driving in town - it was far too terrible to attempt a takeoff from a strange city, at an unfamiliar altitude, with an overloaded plane. My first reaction that morning was anger. I wanted to wring the necks of the adult men who were using a little girl as a prop for their own purposes. Before I knew they had all died in the crash, I wanted to get my hands on her father and the instructor.

That 1996 crash with little Jessica would not have been avoided if every tree in and near Lions Park had been laid to waste. Nor would any other of the crashes linked to Cheyenne over the past 65 years. American Eagle will face the same danger most of the other crashes resulted from - the weather.

Here are some of the stories: "October 17, 1946 (1:00 am) - The crash of a chartered eastbound passenger plane killed all 10 passengers and the crew of three during a heavy snowstorm three miles

west of Laramie early today. Weather conditions were not favorable ... at midnight, the ceiling was down to 100 feet and visibility was a half mile in Cheyenne."

"October 8, 1946 - An early morning crash of a United Air Lines mainliner as it glided in for a landing at the Cheyenne airport took the lives of two persons and caused injuries, some believed to be serious, to at least 10 persons shortly before dawn this morning." *This was a predawn crash.*

"April 1995 - A small plane attempting to return to Cheyenne Airport landed at the mall (Frontier Mall), hitting the movie theater sign and shooting flames across the parking lot ... killing the pilot."

"April 11, 2008 - A former Campbell River resident was killed in a plane crash on Monday north of Cheyenne. He was flying solo in his homemade Glasair III. The crash occurred in near whiteout conditions." *A homemade plane.*

"August 10, 2005 - An experimental airplane crash at the Fort Collins-Loveland Municipal Airport killed a Cheyenne man Sunday." *An experimental plane.*

"July 10, 2003 - A World War II-era German bomber en route to an air show crashed into a building (bus barn) under construction Thursday, killing the pilot and his passenger." *A vintage plane.*

The point to this recital of airplane crashes with fatalities is to point out that seldom do crashes occur on takeoff. The Dubroff crash was an aberration. And it did not strike any trees in Lions Park - it quickly spun out of control to the north and crashed on Kornegay Court, east of the north Albertson's.

Inexperienced pilots of small and experimental or old airplanes flying in bad weather have seen more crashes with fatalities than commercial flights.

To hit those trees that are been considered for destruction in Lions Park, a pilot would have to lose control on takeoff and would plow into buildings or people as likely as those trees. Coupled with the real potential for an airline benefitting from the falling of these trees not being in Cheyenne for more than a few months to a maximum of two years, it would be imprudent for the City to agree to remove the trees. The trees are certain. American Eagle is not. Leave 'em alone.

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