

Petition Via Fax

From the Florida Offices of **Leesfield Leighton Rubio** Trial Lawyers

Miami: 2350 South Dixie Highway, Miami, Florida 33133, Telephone: **(800) 836-6400/(305) 854-4900**
Key West: 615½ Whitehead Street, Key West, Florida 33040, Telephone: **(800) 836-6400**
E-mail: Leesfield@aol.com

Crash Renews Questions About Low Fare Airlines



A ValuJet DC-9 burns in Atlanta in June 1995

ValuJet DC-9 nosedives in Everglades ***DOT Official: "I avoided ValuJet"***

The devastating crash of a ValuJet DC-9 ignites new questions about the safety of low cost "peanut fare" airlines that have prospered in the last few years. One of the worst years in aviation history continued this past Saturday when a ValuJet DC-9 jet crashed 12 miles northwest of Miami, leaving no apparent survivors. Flight 592 was carrying 104 passengers and 5 crew, which was bound for Atlanta from Miami. A few minutes after

takeoff the pilot reported smoke in the cockpit and then radioed that the plane was returning to Miami. It never arrived. The plane apparently impacted almost vertically into the swampy marsh, disintegrating and submerging any remaining debris. Rescue attempts were hampered by the remote area and the murky, alligator-infested swamp conditions, which are only accessible by airboat and helicopter.

The crash location was within a few miles from Miami's previously worst air crash. In 1972 an Eastern Airlines Lockheed L1011 crashed in the Everglades 18 miles northwest 101 people. ValuJet has been the subject of increased scrutiny by the FAA because of its rapid growth, numerous incidents and low fares. The FAA officially has passed ValuJet in its inspections but the incidents involving these older aircraft have continued.

Leesfield appointed to American Airlines Colombia crash steering committee

LEESFIELD, LEIGHTON & RUBIO partner Ira Leesfield has been appointed by United States District Judge Stanley Marcus to the Plaintiff's Steering Committee to direct the litigation against American Airlines over the December 1995 crash in Colombia. 163 people perished when the Boeing 757 slammed into a mountain on its way to Cali, Colombia. The case is being litigated in the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida in Miami.



of Miami, killing

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Airline was new but already a cause of safety concerns

ValuJet may have only been formed 33 months ago, but it was already subject to safety inquiries. Because of its rapid growth and low cost nature, the FAA took began an investigation into ValuJet's safety practices. One of the precipitating factors was a June 1995 fire which started in an engine and spread to the fuselage of a DC-9 in Atlanta, badly burning a flight attendant.



McDonnell Douglas DC-9 aircraft

Beside the fire, there have been several other minor incidents. Recent FAA scrutiny has caused ValuJet to scale back some of its growth plans, which began in 1993 with two used jets. The DC-9 aircraft involved in the crash was purchased in 1994 from Delta Airlines and was built in 1969, raising concerns about the age of the plane.

Federal Safety Official: "I avoided flying ValuJet"

A high-level Department of Transportation official has said that she has avoided ValuJet because of safety concerns. "I have skipped conferences because I would not fly on marginal airlines (and because of its many mishaps, I also avoided flying on ValuJet)," wrote Mary Fackler Schiavo, inspector general of the DOT, in an aviation column. Most disturbing is the fact that the DC-9 that was operating as Flight 592 had returned to airports at least seven times in the last two years due to safety problems. ValuJet claims that its low maintenance and staff costs did not sacrifice safety, but many aviation experts are critical. Flying 27 year-old airplanes that have been retired by other carriers, ValuJet was nearing the end of a special 120-day investigation into its maintenance, training and personnel. That investigation is now being broadened.

In what may be an important clue into the Miami tragedy, on Saturday the inbound flight, ValuJet flight 591, experienced a delay in leaving Atlanta bound for Miami. According to at least one passenger, the pilot announced to the passengers that there was a paperwork delay. But apparently the DC-9's engines were turned on and off at least three times before the 27 year-old jet departed on its last complete flight.



Bad year for aviation gets even worse

The ValuJet crash is the 13th commercial aviation crash in the last three years in which 100 or more people have been killed. In the last five months alone there have been six major air disasters, including the December 20, 1995 crash of an American Airlines Boeing 757 in the mountains of Colombia. Transportation Secretary Federico Pena announced that the FAA will broaden its review of ValuJet following this crash.

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Facsimile: (305) 854-8266 **E-mail:** leesfield@aol.com