

Japan Airlines jet bursts into flames after collision with earthquake relief plane at Tokyo Haneda airport

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Five people were killed when a Japan Airlines plane carrying hundreds of passengers collided with an earthquake relief aircraft and burst into flames on landing at Tokyo's Haneda airport on Tuesday.

All 379 people on JAL flight 516, including eight children under the age of two, were safely evacuated from the passenger plane, according to the airline, but there were fatalities on the second aircraft, operated by the Japan Coast Guard.

The Airbus A350-900 aircraft ignited after flying into Haneda from the northern Japanese city of Sapporo at 5:46 p.m. local time (3:46 a.m. ET). Video showed a huge fireball erupt as the plane ignited, leaving a fiery trail down the runway.

Five crew members died on the second aircraft, a De Havilland Canada DHC-8, according to Japan's transport minister, Tetsuo Saito. Public broadcaster NHK said the plane's captain was in a critical condition.

Japan Airlines said four of its passengers were taken to hospitals but the airline has not received any additional reports of injuries, the airline's Senior Vice President Noriyuki Aoki said in a press conference Tuesday evening.

Japan Airlines is taking part in the investigation to determine who is responsible for the deadly crash, its senior vice president of corporate safety and security Tadayuki Tsutsumi told reporters. The French aviation agency is also sending its own investigators to Tokyo to probe the collision as part of the investigation team opened by Japan Transport Safety Board, it said in a statement.

In a later statement, Japan Airlines said its crew had been cleared to land by air traffic control before the collision. Audio from LiveATC.net appears to detail the crew reading back a clearance order for runway 34, saying "cleared to land 34 right."

“According to interviews with the operating crew, they acknowledged and repeated the landing permission from air traffic control, and then proceeded with the approach and landing procedures,” Japan Airlines said.

The statement said that after landing, the Japan Air Lines Airbus A350 “collided with a Japan Coast Guard aircraft and caught fire.”

After the blaze broke out, the plane was seen at a standstill with people using emergency slides to flee the inferno as firefighters tried to battle the growing flames. More than 100 fire trucks were dispatched in response to the accident, NHK reports.

‘Big bang’

Guy Maestre, originally from France, was on board an adjacent plane at the time of the accident on Tuesday and describes hearing a “big bang.”

“I was hoping everyone was going to be safe,” Maestre, who had been visiting Japan from Philadelphia, told CNN, adding that it was “shocking to see.”

“I was in another plane in the window seat – we were getting ready to take off and we heard a big bang.

“We looked from our windows and saw a huge trail of flames running down the runway.

“Flames got higher and higher then we saw fire trucks go by the runway.”

Mika Yamake had been on her way to the airport to meet her husband, who was on board the JAL plane, when news of the accident broke.

“I didn’t realize it was such a big incident until I saw images on the news,” she told CNN. “At first it was just reports of smoke, but then I saw images of flames and I felt more worried. I only realized my husband was on that plane when he called me.”

“He called me from inside and told me he saw smoke coming out. I was relieved he was safe. He just came out with his mobile phone. He had to leave everything else behind.”

Mika’s husband, Satoshi Yamake, told CNN when the flight landed that he initially didn’t feel anything out of the ordinary.

“We landed normally, didn’t feel a shock or anything,” Yamake told CNN at Haneda airport after he was evacuated from the crash.

He added that he saw a fire shortly before an announcement was made to evacuate the plane.

“But then we saw fire coming out of the engines and I found it strange. Just as I was thinking why the fire was burning for so long, an announcement came and said we probably hit something on the runway and we have to now evacuate the plane,” Yamake said. “We could smell some smoke but passengers were not panicking a lot.”

He said he “was not really scared.”

“Since we have landed already, I was thinking the plane probably won’t explode by this point. We should be fine as long as everyone gets off the plane in an orderly manner.”

A Japan Coast Guard spokesman told CNN that its aircraft had been headed from Haneda airport to an airbase in Niigata prefecture to help with relief efforts following a 7.5-magnitude earthquake on Monday.

Flight 516 had been heading inbound to Haneda from Sapporo’s New Chitose Airport in Hokkaido prefecture. The airline said it was carrying a total of 367 passengers, including eight infants, plus 12 crew members.

The majority of departures from Haneda Airport are now canceled and it’s unclear when flight services will resume, NHK reports.