INVESTIGATION OF FIELD PROBLEMS CAUSING AIRCRAFT OPERATIONAL ISSUES

Daniel C. Mertens¹ and George R. Wilson, III²

¹Director of Quality Assurance, Tesoro Corporation, 300 Concord Plaza Dr., San Antonio, TX 78216-6999

²Senior Research Scientist, Southwest Research Institute, PO Drawer 28510, San Antonio, TX 78228-0510

In 2005 and 2006 a series of engine start-up incidents involving helicopter operations in a remote location pointed to a problem with the thermal stability of the fuel. A thorough investigation, however, proved the fuel to be adequate for the job and the real problem to lie in how the fuel was handled. In the process of discovering the true causal factors of the situation we learned significant lessons about how individuals jump to conclusions by creating perceptions about a fuel-handling problem in contrast to identifying true, explicit causal factors.