

The Risk Professional: to travel or not to travel, that is the question

It's a basic policy that many boards follow - most of the time. Don't all or most of the senior management on the same train, plane or bus. But in the week when Poland faces elections after its president took senior members of government and government institutions on a disastrous flight, an Australian mining company is grieving the loss of most of its board in a fatal plane crash in Africa.

When Polish president Lech Kaczynski and 95 others including Poland's army chief, central bank governor and a number of senior MPs were killed as the Tupolev 154, built more than 20 years ago in Russia, ploughed into a Russian forest in heavy fog. Analysis of the cockpit voice recorder has shown voices that were not those of the crew increasing suspicion that Kaczynski was repeating his previous behaviour of berating a pilot for deciding conditions were too dangerous to attempt a landing.

Kaczynski should have had more sense than to put so many important people onto the same plane: it has had a history of mechanical problems, some of which have occurred with the president on board.

But the loss of the senior board members of Sundance Resources is at least a little different. During the search for the downed aircraft, it emerged that the plan was for the board to be split between two aircraft. Ken Talbot, whose company Talbot Group owns around 20% of Sundance, had taken his own plane to Cameroon with the intention that some would travel to Congo with him and some in the chartered aircraft.

But runway work at the destination airport meant that Talbot's private jet could not land so, rather than abandon the research visit, they all hopped into the little twin engined prop-driven plane and set off.

The wreckage of the aircraft was found yesterday and all passengers and crew have been confirmed dead. It was about 10km inside the Cameroon border with Congo in dense jungle.

Sundance has a 90% holding in Cameroon Iron Ore Company and were on a fact-finding trip in relation to the extent of the reserves that may be in the company's 1800 square kilometres of land.