New Seats May Have Saved Lives in Jamaica Crash

Investigators say the seats on an American Airlines flight that crashed after landing in Kingston, Jamaica, last week may be one reason why everyone got out alive.

The plane skidded off the end of a runway, jumped a fence, crashed onto a beach and broke into three pieces. But all 154 people on board survived. The American Airlines 737-800 was only 8 years old, and it was equipped with newer 16G seats, which are designed to withstand forces up to 16 times the force of gravity in a crash. "That may have contributed to the 100-percent survivability factor," said Col. Oscar Derby, Jamaica's director general of Civil Aviation. Derby said there are no indications that any of the seats collapsed or broke loose from the floor. Dallas-based aviation safety consultant Denny Kelly said seat failures are a leading cause of injuries and deaths in airplane crashes. "They collapse, and then people tumble forward, and they can hit their head on the seat in front of them," Kelly said. This would not the first time 16G seats helped passengers live through a crash. Investigators believe they helped prevent deaths in the crash of Air France Flight 358 in Toronto in 2005. The Federal Aviation Administration mandated the new 16G seats on all new airplanes starting this fall. Airlines are not required to retrofit older planes. But many airlines have upgraded the seats on their own because the newer seats are lighter, which saves fuel.