

Investigators Seek Local Help to Reach MH17 Wreckage in East Ukraine

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Members of the OSCE stand near a policeman representing Donetsk People's Republic at the crash site of the downed Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, near the village of Hrabove in the Donetsk region.

AMSTERDAM — Accident investigators looking into the July crash of a Malaysia Airlines plane in eastern Ukraine have said they will probably hire local contractors to collect wreckage still beyond their reach because of a continuing pro-Russian insurrection.

The crash of flight MH17 as it flew over the conflict zone stirred angry mutual accusation between Moscow and the West over who was responsible. Investigators have had little access to the site, which is under rebel control.

The Dutch Safety Board said Dutch officials would go to the crash site to help with an operation that could begin in days. A recent mission to repatriate body parts and belongings of the 298 victims involved local emergency services.

Kiev accuses pro-Russian separatists of shooting down the plane. Russia says a Ukrainian military aircraft shot down MH17, more than two-thirds of whose passengers were Dutch.

Dutch authorities were able to reach the site of the crash for the first time in weeks on Oct 31 after fighting between government forces and rebels had eased off under a truce.

"The Dutch Safety Board has commissioned the recovery and transportation to the Netherlands of wreckage from flight MH17," the board said in a statement, without saying who had been employed. "As part of the investigation ... the Dutch Safety Board intends to reconstruct a section of the aircraft."

Asked if the contractors would be local, a safety board official said: "Yes, probably. From nearby."

The government has come in for increasingly fierce criticism from relatives of victims and opposition lawmakers who say it has been too cautious about going to the crash site to repatriate body parts and investigate the crash.

The Dutch government has refused to deal directly with the rebels who control the site, whom it regards as illegitimate. It has said it believes investigators could be endangered there.

An interim report published in September, which was based on data from the aircraft's black box recorders, photographic and radar evidence, and satellite imagery, said the Boeing 777 was brought down by "high energy objects" in its vicinity — consistent with attack from the air or the ground.

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