Beat: Technology

Deadly 2013 plane crash at Ga. airport was caused by pilot error, fatigue

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USPA News - The crash of a business jet at a regional airport in eastern Georgia more than 1.5 year ago, which killed five passengers and injured the two surviving pilots, was caused by a combination of pilot error and fatigue, according to an official report published on Tuesday. The accident happened at about 8:06 p.m. local time on February 20, 2013, when the Hawker Beechcraft 390 Premier 1 aircraft crashed while attempting to land at Thomson-McDuffie County Airport in Thomson, about 110 miles (177 kilometers) east of Atlanta.

The aircraft was carrying two pilots and five passengers on a flight from Nashville, Tennessee. In a final report released by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) on Tuesday, the agency concluded that the crash was caused by the pilot who made several mistakes when the landing attempt went awry. The pilot`s lack of familiarity with the plane and his fatigue contributed to the crash, which killed all five passengers and seriously injured both pilots. "This pilot`s inadequate knowledge of his aircraft was compounded by his fatigue," NTSB Acting Chairman Christopher Hart said in releasing the final report. "As a result, five people died who did not have to. Just as pilots should not take off without enough fuel, they should not operate an aircraft without enough rest." According to the report, while on approach to the airport, a light illuminated to warn the pilots of an antiskid failure after the landing gear had been lowered. The co-pilot commented on the illumination but the 56-year-old pilot failed to take any action and instead continued the approach. He also did not consult a checklist which addresses antiskid failure and provides specific landing distance values. Had the pilot consulted the checklist, he would have known that landing at Thomson-McDuffie County Airport was not an option because both flap configurations used in such situations require a longer distance than the airport`s runway provides. But instead of aborting the approach and addressing the issue, the pilot continued his approach. As the business jet touched down on the runway, the aircraft did not slow down as the pilot expected and, about seven seconds later, the pilot initiated a go-around. While doing so, the pilot failed to retract the lift dump, which is a critical system to assist in stopping the aircraft and makes a safe climb unlikely. As a result of both errors, the aircraft collided with a utility pole at a height of about 63 feet (19 meters) before striking trees and crashing close to a large plant in a wooded area near the airport. All five passengers - who were seated in the back and were not using seatbelts - died of multiple traumatic injuries. Both pilots survived with serious injuries. Contributing to the cause of the crash was the pilot`s lack of sleep on the day of the accident, as he had slept for only five hours before having to wake up at 2 a.m., which was significantly earlier than his normal waking time of 6 a.m. The pilot told investigators that he slept for another 4 hours in a chair after arriving in Nashville, but cell phone records revealed three outgoing calls during that period. "His cell phone activity indicated outgoing calls during that time, suggesting interruptions to his sleep, which would have fragmented any sleep the pilot did obtain and degrade its restorative quality," the NTSB report said. "Additionally, the accident took place about 20:06, indicating an extended period of wakefulness based on the early awakening." Prior to the failed landing attempt in Georgia, the co-pilot had to remind the pilot twice about a speed restriction and the altimeter, to which the pilot responded by saying that he was "out of the loop," indicating that he was experiencing fatigue. "Had the pilot not been fatigued, he likely would have paid closer attention to the flight and not had lapses in performance," the report said.

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