National Transportation Safety Board
Aviation Accident Data Summary

Location: Harbor Springs, MI
Accident Number: CEN15FA342

Date & Time: 08/09/2015, 2325 EDT
Registration: N43829

Aircraft: PIPER PA 32R-300
Injuries: 1 Fatal

Flight Conducted Under: Part 91: General Aviation - Personal

Analysis
The private pilot was completing a long cross-country flight during dark, night visual meteorological conditions. While on a visual approach to the runway, the airplane impacted trees and terrain less than a mile from the end of the runway. The pilot had not logged night flight experience in several years and had not logged any night flight experience in the make and model of the accident airplane. Additionally, he had not logged a flight into the airport in his logbook. The airport's tree obstructions and nonstandard precision approach path indicator with a 4.0-degree glidepath were noted in the airport facility directory. However, it was the pilot's first flight into the airport; thus, it is likely that his unfamiliarity with the airport environment, including the trees close proximity to the airport and nonstandard glidepath, and the dark, night conditions led to his failure to maintain clearance from the trees. The witness marks on the trees and the damage to the airplane were consistent with the airplane being in a relatively wings level descent when it impacted the tops of the trees. The condition of the landing gear and flaps were consistent with the airplane being configured to land. There were no mechanical anomalies with the airplane, engine, or related systems that would have precluded normal operation at the time of the accident.

Flight Events

Approach-VFR pattern final - Controlled flight into terr/obj (CFIT)

Probable Cause
The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: The pilot's failure to maintain clearance from the trees during the approach in dark, night conditions, which resulted in controlled flight into trees and terrain.

Findings

Aircraft-Aircraft oper/perf/capability-Performance/control parameters-Altitude-Not attained/maintained - C
Personnel issues-Psychological-Attention/monitoring-Monitoring environment-Pilot - C
Environmental issues-Conditions/weather/phenomena-Light condition-Dark-Effect on personnel - C
Environmental issues-Physical environment-Object/animal/substance-Tree(s)-Effect on operation
Pilot Information

Certificate: Private  
Age: 58

Airplane Rating(s): Single-engine Land 
Instrument Rating(s): None

Other Aircraft Rating(s): None 
Instructor Rating(s): None

Flight Time: 406.9 hours (Total, all aircraft), 78.4 hours (Total, this make and model), 0 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 2 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft)

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make: PIPER 
Registration: N43829

Model/Series: PA 32R-300 
Engines: Reciprocating

Operator: On file 
Engine Manufacturer: LYCOMING

Operating Certificate(s) Held: None 
Engine Model/Series: IO-540-K1G5D

Flight Conducted Under: Part 91: General Aviation - Personal

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site: Visual Conditions 
Condition of Light: Night/Dark

Observation Facility, Elevation: KMGN, 677 ft msl 
Weather Information Source: Unknown

Lowest Ceiling: Broken / 5000 ft agl 
Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction: Calm / ,

Temperature: 20°C 
Visibility: 10 Miles

Precipitation and Obscuration: No Obscuration; No Precipitation

Departure Point: Detroit, MI (DET) 
Destination: Harbor Springs, MI (MGN)

Airport Information

Airport: HARBOR SPRINGS (MGN) 
Runway Surface Type: Asphalt

Runway Used: 28 
Runway Surface Condition:

Runway Length/Width: 4149 ft / 75 ft

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries: 1 Fatal 
Aircraft Damage: Substantial

Passenger Injuries: N/A 
Aircraft Fire: None

Ground Injuries: N/A 
Aircraft Explosion: None

Latitude, Longitude: 45.424444, -84.899444 (est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC): Jennifer Rodi 
Adopted Date: 08/23/2016

Note: The NTSB traveled to the scene of this accident.

Investigation Docket: http://dms.ntsb.gov/pubdms/search/dockList.cfm?mKey=91738

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), established in 1967, is an independent federal agency mandated by Congress through the Independent Safety Board Act of 1974 to investigate transportation accidents, determine the probable causes of the
accidents, issue safety recommendations, study transportation safety issues, and evaluate the safety effectiveness of government agencies involved in transportation. The NTSB makes public its actions and decisions through accident reports, safety studies, special investigation reports, safety recommendations, and statistical reviews.

The Independent Safety Board Act, as codified at 49 U.S.C. Section 1154(b), precludes the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an incident or accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report.