



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Factual Report

Location:	Willits, CA	Accident Number:	LAX04CA309
Date & Time:	09/01/2004, 2100 PDT	Registration:	N897TW
Aircraft:	Cessna 172S	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:		Injuries:	1 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General Aviation - Personal		

On September 1, 2004, about 2100 Pacific daylight time, a Cessna 172S, N897TW, operated by the airplane's pilot-owner, descended into trees about 1/8-mile west of the Willits Municipal Airport, Willits, California. The airplane was destroyed, and the private pilot received minor injuries. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed for the dark, nighttime personal flight, and no flight plan had been filed. The pilot was operating the airplane under the provisions of 14 CFR Part 91, and the flight originated from Watsonville, California, at 1936.

The pilot reported to the National Transportation Safety Board investigator that he experienced no mechanical malfunctions during the flight. The airplane's landing light was functional, although he did not use it.

According to the pilot, seconds prior to the crash he was attempting to locate his home base airport. The pilot reported to the Safety Board investigator and to an officer from the Mendocino County Sheriff's department that, upon arriving in the vicinity of the airport, he keyed the airplane's radio transmitter to activate the airport's runway lights. The pilot reported that he made two such attempts, and both were unsuccessful. Thereafter, he maneuvered toward what he believed was the airport, with the intention of making a low pass over runway 16/34 to ascertain the possibility that the runway lights were partially operating.

The pilot additionally reported that while looking for the runway he initially intended to level out about 500 feet above the traffic pattern altitude. But evidently, the airplane continued descending until it collided with trees and terrain, west of the runway. The pilot also acknowledged to the Safety Board investigator that neither prior to taking off, nor at any time during the accident flight, did he become aware of the fact that the destination airport's runway lights were out of service.

According to the Federal Aviation Administration's Automated Flight Service Station in Oakland, California, in September 2004, NOTAM (Notice to Airman) number 08/104 was issued. The NOTAM was in effect on the accident date, and it stated: "Runway 16/34 runway lights out of service."

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	Age:	68, Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine Land	Seat Occupied:	
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Restraint Used:	Seatbelt, Shoulder harness
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	
Instructor Rating(s):		Toxicology Performed:	
Medical Certification:	Class 3	Last FAA Medical Exam:	03/20/2003
Occupational Pilot:		Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:	1656 hours (Total, all aircraft), 183 hours (Total, this make and model), 24 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 7 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Cessna	Registration:	N897TW
Model/Series:	172S	Aircraft Category:	Airplane
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	No
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	172S8978
Landing Gear Type:	Tricycle	Seats:	
Date/Type of Last Inspection:		Certified Max Gross Wt.:	
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Airframe Total Time:		Engine Manufacturer:	Lycoming
ELT:		Engine Model/Series:	IO-360-L2A
Registered Owner:	Edward A. Warburton	Rated Power:	
Operator:	Edward A. Warburton	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual Conditions	Condition of Light:	Night/Dark
Observation Facility, Elevation:		Distance from Accident Site:	
Observation Time:		Direction from Accident Site:	
Lowest Cloud Condition:		Visibility	
Lowest Ceiling:		Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	/	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:		Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:		Temperature/Dew Point:	
Precipitation and Obscuration:			
Departure Point:	Watsonville, CA (WVI)	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:	Willits, CA (O28)	Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:		Type of Airspace:	Class G

Airport Information

Airport:	Willits Municipal (O28)	Runway Surface Type:	
Airport Elevation:		Runway Surface Condition:	
Runway Used:	NA	IFR Approach:	None
Runway Length/Width:		VFR Approach/Landing:	

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Minor	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	
Total Injuries:	1 Minor	Latitude, Longitude:	39.450278, -123.379167

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Wayne Pollack
Additional Participating Persons:	Harold Kernahan; Federal Aviation Administration; Oakland, CA
Note:	This accident report documents the factual circumstances of this accident as described to the NTSB.
Investigation Docket:	NTSB accident and incident dockets serve as permanent archival information for the NTSB's investigations. Dockets released prior to June 1, 2009 are publicly available from the NTSB's Record Management Division at pubinq@ntsb.gov , or at 800-877-6799. Dockets released after this date are available at http://dms.nts.gov/pubdms/ .