



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Final 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		

Analysis

While maneuvering to locate the runway during a dark, nighttime flight, the airplane descended until colliding with trees. As the pilot approached his home base airport, he attempted to activate the pilot controlled runway lights. However, he was unsuccessful. Thereafter, the pilot performed a low altitude pass over what he believed was runway 16/34 to ascertain if a portion of the runway's lights were operating. During the maneuver, the pilot failed to detect that the airplane was not aligned with the runway. Also, the pilot failed to maintain adequate altitude to avoid colliding with trees 1/8-mile west of the airport. Neither prior to taking off, nor at any time during the accident flight, did the pilot become aware that a Notice to Airman had been issued indicating that the airport's runway lights were "out of service."

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: the pilot's inadvertent descent and controlled flight into obstacles while maneuvering to land. Contributing factors were the dark, nighttime condition, which impaired the pilot's visual perceptions, and the pilot's failure to obtain a pertinent Notice to Airman regarding inoperative runway lights.

Findings

Occurrence #1: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH OBJECT
Phase of Operation: MANEUVERING

Findings

1. OBJECT - TREE(S)
2. (F) AIRPORT FACILITIES, IN-RUNWAY LIGHTS - NOT OPERATING
3. (F) NOTAMS - NOT OBTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND
4. (F) LIGHT CONDITION - DARK NIGHT
5. (C) ALTITUDE - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND
6. (F) VISUAL/AURAL PERCEPTION - PILOT IN COMMAND

Factual Information

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	Report Date:	12/03/2004
Additional Participating Persons:	Harold Kernahan; Federal Aviation Administration; Oakland, CA		
Publish Date:			
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 pubinquiry@ntsb.gov , or at 800-877-6799. Dockets released after this date are available at http://dms.nts.gov/pubdms/ .		

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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. A factual report that may be admissible under 49 U.S.C. § 1154(b) is available [here](#).