



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Data Summary

Location:	Willits, CA	Accident Number:	LAX04CA309
Date & Time:	09/01/2004, 2100 PDT	Registration:	N897TW
Aircraft:	Cessna 172S	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

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

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	Age:	68
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine Land	Instrument Rating(s):	None
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	None	Instructor Rating(s):	
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	Engines:	1 Reciprocating
Operator:	Edward A. Warburton	Engine Manufacturer:	Lycoming
Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None	Engine Model/Series:	IO-360-L2A
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:		Weather Information Source:	
Lowest Ceiling:		Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	/ ,
Temperature:		Visibility	
Precipitation and Obscuration:			
Departure Point:	Watsonville, CA (WVI)	Destination:	Willits, CA (O28)

Airport Information

Airport:	Willits Municipal (O28)	Runway Surface Type:	
Runway Used:	NA	Runway Surface Condition:	
Runway Length/Width:			

Wreckage and Impact Information

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

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Wayne Pollack	Adopted Date:	12/03/2004
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/ .		

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