

Pilot error cause of fatal aircraft crash in 2024

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The cause of the plane crash that killed a King family last year was pilot error. According to the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the pilot's failure to ensure the proper placement of the fuel selector during the approach and landing resulted in fuel starvation and a subsequent total loss of engine power. That was the conclusion of an almost year-long investigation into the March 4, 2024 tragedy that claimed the lives of Victor Dotsenko, 43, his wife Rimma, 39, and their children David, 12, Adam, 10, and Emma, 7. Victor was piloting the Piper PA32RT from Ontario en route to Florida for a family vacation, when the crash occurred near Nashville, Tennessee that evening. According to the NTSB, one mile from the runway, the airplane remained at an altitude about 2,400 feet, and the pilot subsequently informed the tower controller that he wanted to overfly the airport at 2,500 feet and come back to land on runway 20. The reason could not be determined, and the controller did not inquire about the reason, but instructed the pilot to contact the approach controller again. Residential video/audio cameras captured the sound of the airplane's engine as it overflowed the airport. Analysis of the audio revealed that the engine was operating at nearly full continuous power of about 2,650 rpm before the engine sound became abnormal, and the audio contained several "popping" noises before the sound of engine noise ended. When the airplane was south of the airport, the approach controller asked if the pilot still had the airport in sight. The pilot stated that his engine had "turned off," and that he would be landing, but he did not know where. The controller declared an emergency and repeatedly cleared the pilot to land on runway 2. The pilot responded that he had the runway in sight, but was too far away to reach it. Shortly after, the airplane impacted terrain adjacent to an interstate, 2 nautical miles south of the runway and a significant post-impact fire ensued. An examination of the aircraft revealed no evidence of mechanical failure or anomalies. However, the examination of the fuel system revealed the fuel selector was between the "off" and "left main" tank positions. This setting, the report noted, would starve the engine of fuel and was likely the result of the pilot changing the fuel selector handle in preparation for landing. It is likely that the pilot moved the fuel selector in position, resulting in a restricted fuel flow that was less than that needed to sustain engine power. Following the loss of engine power, the remaining altitude was insufficient to provide gliding distance to the runway. The airplane departed under visual flight rules (VFR) from Brampton-Caledon Airport at roughly 12:22 p.m. and arrived at Erie International Airport/Tom Ridge Field (ERI) Erie, Pennsylvania, about one hour later. At ERI, the pilot added 11 gallons of fuel to each wing fuel tank. The pilot departed about 90 minutes later and flew to Mount Sterling/Montgomery County Airport (IOB), Mount Sterling, Kentucky, where he added a total of 52.1 gallons of fuel. The third flight leg was from IOB to John C Tune Airport (JWN), Nashville, Tennessee, about 180 miles away. The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for an accident, rather, investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties.