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No cause determined for medical helicopter crash

FROM STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

Federal safety investigators said Thursday that flying at night in poor weather conditions contributed to three medical helicopter crashes that killed 12 people, but did not rule on the cause of the August crash near Greensburg that killed a Cambridge City man and two crew members.

The National Transportation Safety Board blamed a fourth crash on Dec. 30, 2007, near Cherokee, Ala., on flying too low over trees as the EMS helicopter searched for a lost hunter.

The pilot, a paramedic and a flight nurse were killed.

The board released the probable cause of the four crashes and information on five others. Among them was last year's crash near Greensburg that killed Wade Weston, 38, of Cambridge City, a flight paramedic and base manager aboard the Air Evac Lifeteam helicopter that crashed shortly after the crew made an afternoon appearance at a fundraiser for the Burney Volunteer Fire Department.

Weston was a 1988 graduate of Lincoln High School, 1997 graduate of Sinclair Community College as a paramedic and an August 2008 graduate of Ivy Tech as a registered nurse. He was a former volunteer fireman in Dublin and had worked at Fayette Memorial Hospital for 15 years.

Other crew members were pilot Roger Warren and flight nurse Sandra Pearson. The three died after the chopper crashed into the field as it returned to its base at Rush Memorial Hospital in Rushville.

They are among 35 people killed in nine EMS helicopter crashes since December 2007.

Three years ago, the NTSB recommended all EMS helicopters be equipped with Terrain Awareness Warning Systems. The technology, which is used aboard commercial jetliners, warns pilots who can't see where they're heading when the aircraft is on course to fly into the ground.

Installation of the equipment still is not required by the Federal Aviation Administration.

Other safety recommendations included more formal procedures for evaluating the risks of making an emergency medical flight, particularly at night and in poor weather, and for obtaining up-to-date weather information. Those recommendations have not been fully implemented either.

The board has scheduled a four-day hearing in early February to give the issue greater visibility and urgency.

Additional Facts

ON THE WEB

- <http://www.nts.gov>
- <http://www.faa.gov>

- <http://www.aams.org>
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