



# Aviation Investigation Final Report

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<b>Location:</b>	ALTHA, Florida	<b>Accident Number:</b>	MIA97LA208
<b>Date &amp; Time:</b>	July 8, 1997, 16:50 Local	<b>Registration:</b>	N1509C
<b>Aircraft:</b>	Air Tractor            AT-401	<b>Aircraft Damage:</b>	Destroyed
<b>Defining Event:</b>		<b>Injuries:</b>	1 Minor
<b>Flight Conducted Under:</b>	Part 137: Agricultural		

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## Analysis

The flight was taking off on a runway that was part asphalt and part grass. The takeoff roll was started on the asphalt, and when the airplane reached the grass part of the runway, the pilot said he attempted to 'dump' the chemicals about 100 feet from the end of the runway, because the airplane would not come off the ground. The pilot was interviewed at his home by the Sheriff, and said; '...upon taking off, the plane would just not get up...he flew the plane earlier without a problem...when he dumped the load of chemicals on the runway, the plane went up, hit the top of a power pole with a wing and then went down into small pines....' The FAA inspector's reported stated that pilot said 'he had problems with aircraft performance on climbout.' Examination of the airframe and engine did not reveal any discrepancies. Several witnesses ran to the crash to aid the pilot, and they stated that when they reach the pilot they saw that he 'staggered and smelled of alcohol.' The witnesses said they did not see him consume anything before he got into a car 'Bronco' and leave the scene. A test taken in the hospital about 2 hours after the accident showed an ethanol level of 143 mg/dl in the pilot's blood.

## Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: the pilot's impairment of judgment and performance due to alcohol which led to his failure to maintain control of the airplane.

## Findings

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Occurrence #1: IN FLIGHT COLLISION WITH OBJECT  
Phase of Operation: TAKEOFF - INITIAL CLIMB

### Findings

1. (C) AIRCRAFT CONTROL - NOT MAINTAINED - PILOT IN COMMAND
2. (C) IMPAIRMENT(ALCOHOL) - PILOT IN COMMAND
3. OBJECT - POLE

## Factual Information

On July 8, 1997, about 1650 central standard time, an Air Tractor AT-401, N1509C, registered to Thaggard Aviation LLC Inc., crashed during takeoff near Altha, Florida. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed at the time and no flight plan was filed for the Title 14 CFR Part 137 aerial application flight. The commercial-rated pilot reported minor injuries. The airplane was destroyed. The flight was originating at the time from a private airport.

The flight was departing with 180 gallons of chemicals [8 pounds per gallon] and 100 gallons of fuel. The runway was part asphalt and part grass, and the takeoff roll was started on the asphalt. As the airplane rolled down the runway and reached the grass part of the runway, the pilot said he attempted to "dump" the chemicals about 100 feet from the end of the runway, because the airplane would not come off the ground. In addition, he said that even after he dumped the load, the airplane "still didn't want to fly, the aircraft didn't seem to have enough power."

According to the Calhoun County Sheriff's report, the first officer on the scene said when he arrived he saw power lines on the road. The officer further said that the pilot had been "transported by EMS to Calhoun-Liberty Hospital for cuts and bruises." The officer later went to the pilot's home and the pilot told him; "...upon taking off, the plane would just not get up. He advised that he flew the plane earlier without a problem...when he dumped the load of chemicals on the runway, the plane went up, hit the top of a power pole with a wing and then went down into small pines...."

The FAA inspector's report stated that the pilot said "he had problems with aircraft performance on climbout." Examination of the airframe and engine did not reveal any discrepancies. The FAA inspector's report further said, "...post accident blood test taken in the Emergency Room [see emergency room report attached] after the accident indicated a .143 percent, by weight, of alcohol content in [the] pilot's blood." Several witnesses ran to the crash to aid the pilot and they stated that when they reach the pilot they saw that he "staggered and smelled of alcohol." The witnesses said they did not see him consume anything before he got into a car "Bronco" and leave the scene (see statements under Reports from Federal Agencies).

## Pilot Information

<b>Certificate:</b>	Commercial	<b>Age:</b>	59, Male
<b>Airplane Rating(s):</b>	Single-engine land	<b>Seat Occupied:</b>	Front
<b>Other Aircraft Rating(s):</b>	None	<b>Restraint Used:</b>	
<b>Instrument Rating(s):</b>	None	<b>Second Pilot Present:</b>	No
<b>Instructor Rating(s):</b>	None	<b>Toxicology Performed:</b>	No
<b>Medical Certification:</b>	Class 2 Valid Medical-w/ waivers/lim	<b>Last FAA Medical Exam:</b>	April 1, 1997
<b>Occupational Pilot:</b>	Yes	<b>Last Flight Review or Equivalent:</b>	
<b>Flight Time:</b>	9000 hours (Total, all aircraft), 4000 hours (Total, this make and model), 8500 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 50 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 15 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 2 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

## Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

<b>Aircraft Make:</b>	Air Tractor	<b>Registration:</b>	N1509C
<b>Model/Series:</b>	AT-401 AT-401	<b>Aircraft Category:</b>	Airplane
<b>Year of Manufacture:</b>		<b>Amateur Built:</b>	
<b>Airworthiness Certificate:</b>	Normal	<b>Serial Number:</b>	401-0828
<b>Landing Gear Type:</b>	Tailwheel	<b>Seats:</b>	1
<b>Date/Type of Last Inspection:</b>	Annual	<b>Certified Max Gross Wt.:</b>	1500 lbs
<b>Time Since Last Inspection:</b>		<b>Engines:</b>	1 Reciprocating
<b>Airframe Total Time:</b>		<b>Engine Manufacturer:</b>	P&W
<b>ELT:</b>	Not installed	<b>Engine Model/Series:</b>	R-1340
<b>Registered Owner:</b>	SOUTHERFIELD AVIATION	<b>Rated Power:</b>	600 Horsepower
<b>Operator:</b>	DONALD JOHNSON	<b>Operating Certificate(s) Held:</b>	None
<b>Operator Does Business As:</b>		<b>Operator Designator Code:</b>	

## Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

<b>Conditions at Accident Site:</b>	Visual (VMC)	<b>Condition of Light:</b>	Day
<b>Observation Facility, Elevation:</b>	PFN ,21 ft msl	<b>Distance from Accident Site:</b>	35 Nautical Miles
<b>Observation Time:</b>	16:50 Local	<b>Direction from Accident Site:</b>	185°
<b>Lowest Cloud Condition:</b>	Scattered / 15000 ft AGL	<b>Visibility</b>	10 miles
<b>Lowest Ceiling:</b>	Broken / 25000 ft AGL	<b>Visibility (RVR):</b>	
<b>Wind Speed/Gusts:</b>	6 knots /	<b>Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:</b>	/
<b>Wind Direction:</b>	0°	<b>Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:</b>	/
<b>Altimeter Setting:</b>	30 inches Hg	<b>Temperature/Dew Point:</b>	30°C / 23°C
<b>Precipitation and Obscuration:</b>	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
<b>Departure Point:</b>	(22FL)	<b>Type of Flight Plan Filed:</b>	None
<b>Destination:</b>		<b>Type of Clearance:</b>	None
<b>Departure Time:</b>	16:50 Local	<b>Type of Airspace:</b>	

## Airport Information

<b>Airport:</b>	FARM AIR SERVICE 22FL	<b>Runway Surface Type:</b>	Grass/turf
<b>Airport Elevation:</b>	150 ft msl	<b>Runway Surface Condition:</b>	Dry
<b>Runway Used:</b>	0	<b>IFR Approach:</b>	None
<b>Runway Length/Width:</b>	1900 ft / 60 ft	<b>VFR Approach/Landing:</b>	None

## Wreckage and Impact Information

<b>Crew Injuries:</b>	1 Minor	<b>Aircraft Damage:</b>	Destroyed
<b>Passenger Injuries:</b>		<b>Aircraft Fire:</b>	On-ground
<b>Ground Injuries:</b>	N/A	<b>Aircraft Explosion:</b>	None
<b>Total Injuries:</b>	1 Minor	<b>Latitude, Longitude:</b>	30.56982,-85.120567(est)

## Administrative Information

<b>Investigator In Charge (IIC):</b>	Yurman, Alan
<b>Additional Participating Persons:</b>	EMIL A CIRONE; BIRMINGHAM , AL
<b>Original Publish Date:</b>	April 10, 1998
<b>Last Revision Date:</b>	
<b>Investigation Class:</b>	<a href="#">Class</a>
<b>Note:</b>	
<b>Investigation Docket:</b>	<a href="https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=38310">https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=38310</a>

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant events in other modes of transportation—railroad, transit, highway, marine, pipeline, and commercial space. We determine the probable causes of the accidents and events we investigate, and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. In addition, we conduct transportation safety research studies and offer information and other assistance to family members and survivors for each accident or event we investigate. We also serve as the appellate authority for enforcement actions involving aviation and mariner certificates issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and US Coast Guard, and we adjudicate appeals of civil penalty actions taken by the FAA.

The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for an accident or incident; rather, as specified by NTSB regulation, “accident/incident investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties ... and are not conducted for the purpose of determining the rights or liabilities of any person” (Title 49 *Code of Federal Regulations* section 831.4). Assignment of fault or legal liability is not relevant to the NTSB’s statutory mission to improve transportation safety by investigating accidents and incidents and issuing safety recommendations. In addition, statutory language prohibits the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report (Title 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b)). A factual report that may be admissible under 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b) is available [here](#).