

UPDATE 3 -- UPS cargo plane crashes near Alabama airport, killing 2

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USPA News - A large UPS cargo plane crashed and burst into flames Wednesday morning in a field outside an airport in Alabama, killing the two crew members on board, local and federal authorities said. The cause of the crash was not immediately known.

UPS flight 1354, an Airbus A300-600F en-route from Louisville in Kentucky, went down at around 4:45 a.m. local time in a field approximately 0.5 mile (0.8 kilometer) north of Runway 18 at Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport in Birmingham. The flight was coming in for landing after a 45-minute flight. Birmingham Mayor William Bell said debris was scattered across the field, with one large piece of wreckage that erupted into flames. "Initially we thought that the debris field was contained within the area, but now we're hearing that there are several homes that have some debris on top of the roof," he told CBS News, adding no one was injured on the group. Authorities said two people, the pilot and co-pilot, were killed in the crash. One of the victims was identified as 37-year-old pilot Shanda Fanning of Lynchburg in Tennessee, but the identity of the second pilot was not immediately released pending confirmation from the coroner's office. "All of us at UPS extend our deepest sympathies to the families and friends of these two crew members. Our efforts now are primarily focused on helping the families," said UPS Chairman and CEO Scott Davis. He said the UPS Family Assistance Team had already reached out to support the families of the victims. "We place utmost importance on the safety of our employees, our customers and the communities we serve," Davis added. Officials at Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport, which is the largest airport in Alabama, said it was operating normally despite the aircraft crash nearby. "The airport is running normal flight operations. Roads leading to the airport terminal remain open and operational," a spokesperson said. It was not immediately clear what may have caused Wednesday's accident, but both the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the National Transportation Board (NTSB) will launch an investigation. "The NTSB is in charge of the investigation and will determine probable cause," FAA spokeswoman Kathleen Bergen said. "The news from Birmingham is tragic," said Captain Robert Travis, president of the Independent Pilots Association. "UPS and the Independent Pilots Association lost two pilots who were dear friends, and our thoughts and prayers are with their families. IPA is working in full coordination and cooperation with UPS, the NTSB and local authorities." The NTSB said it had mobilized a full go-team to go to the scene and investigate the crash. "The National Transportation Safety Board is launching a full Go-Team to investigate this morning's crash of a United Parcel Service Airbus A300," the agency said, adding that Senior Aviation Investigator Dan Bower will serve as investigator-in-charge. Aircraft manufacturer Airbus expressed its concern and sympathies to the families and loved ones of the victims, but said it would be inappropriate to speculate about what may have caused the accident. It said the aircraft involved in Wednesday's accident had been delivered to UPS from the production line in 2003, and had accumulated approximately 11,000 flight hours in some 6,800 flights. In September 2010, two crew members were killed when UPS flight 6, a Boeing 747-400 aircraft, crashed near a United Arab Emirates (UAE) army camp, about 20 kilometers (12.4 miles) from Dubai International Airport. Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula claimed responsibility for the crash, but investigators later determined it was caused by a fire that originated in a cargo container holding lithium batteries.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

UPA United Press Agency LTD

483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS

contact (at) unitedpressagency.com

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