

FAA Inspector Statement

On February 16, 2020 at 1250 local time, a Piper PA28-140 aircraft, N6520W, registered to a corporation and operated by a student pilot, received substantial damage when it departed the runway surface and struck a packed snow edge during landing at the Paul C. Miller Airport (8D4), Sparta, Michigan. Visual meteorological conditions and light winds prevailed at the time of the accident. The personal flight was being conducted under the provisions of Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 91 without a flight plan. The pilot was not injured. The local flight originated from 8D4 .8 of an hour prior to the accident.

According to the student pilot, the accident occurred during his second landing following his solo endorsement by his flight instructor. During the first landing he lost directional control and stopped 90 degrees from the runway heading but, remained on the runway surface. The pilot then taxied back to the terminal to confer with his instructor. It was then decided by both the instructor and the student to attempt another landing. The student then started the aircraft, taxied to the end of runway 25, and departed without incident. During the second landing the main gear tires touched down and the aircraft immediately turned to the left. The pilot was unable to maintain any directional control and the aircraft struck the packed snow edge of the runway. Witness's stated once the aircraft hit the snow it tipped up on its nose and left wing almost flipping on to its back. Following the accident, the student notified airport traffic by radio of the accident then shut off the magnetos and aircraft master switch. The pilot was able to egress the aircraft unassisted.

The aircraft came to rest approximately 10 feet from the south runway edge in the snow on a heading of 280 degrees magnetic. Runway conditions at the time of the accident had a number of 1-2 inch deep snow/slush areas covering much of the runway surface. Airport personnel were able to remove the aircraft and secure it in a hangar.

Inspection of the aircraft shows substantial damage to the left wing inboard of the tip to the second rib. Leading edge shows aft crushing and upward bending with dirt impaction. The nose landing gear is shifted right of aircraft center with the tire/wheel canted inside the gear fork. Control continuity was confirmed and brakes were found operative. It is unknown if the ELT deployed during the accident sequence. During the interview with the student pilot he stated there were no mechanical anomalies with the aircraft but, was unsure if he struck a patch of snow/slush or if the left brake was frozen on landing.

Weather report at KGRR airport at 1653 UTC was: wind 250 degrees at 8 knots, visibility 10 statute miles, 6,000 broken, temp 01, dew point -04, and altimeter 30.08.

The low time student pilot's lack of flight experience and his flight instructor's decision to allow the student to solo with a partially snow covered runway are causal factors in this accident.

Michael W. Matthews
Principal Maintenance Inspector
Grand Rapids FSDO