

Michael J. Hodges
Investigator-In-Charge, Senior Aviation Accident Investigator
Office of Aviation Safety, Central Regional Office

Date: March 11, 2026

Subject: CEN26LA128 - Airplane Fuel System Information
N5063N (Air Tractor AT-502B Airplane)

The NTSB investigator-in-charge reviewed the onsite photographs provided by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) aviation safety inspector, [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] is an aviation safety inspector with the FAA Baton Rouge Flight Standards District Office in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. [REDACTED] traveled to the accident site on March 2, 2026, to examine the airplane near Larose, Louisiana.

Located in the center of the cockpit, there is a row of warning lights (red colored) and caution lights (amber colored).



On the left side of the row of the lights is a space for a low fuel warning light, however the space is empty, and it is filled with a small metal cover that is painted black. Below the empty space, it states "low fuel."

Located on the left side of the cockpit is the fuel boost pump switch, the fuel pressure gauge, the left fuel tank gauge, and the right fuel tank gauge.



Located on the right side of the cockpit is a switch and circuit breaker panel for operation of the engine.



The circuits breakers for the fuel indicator system, the fuel pressure system, and the fuel boost pump system were all found at the non-extended positions.

The airplane was recovered from the accident site by Southern Aircraft Recovery, and it was transported to their facility in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. [REDACTED], the owner of Southern Aircraft Recovery, reported via email message on March 11, 2026, that less than two gallons of Jet A fuel were recovered from both wing fuel tanks and the header fuel tank during the recovery operation.

A review of the current FAA-approved Air Tractor AT-502B Airplane Flight Manual (AFM), states that the airplane is equipped with a low fuel warning light system in section 7 (page 7-14), airplane systems and equipment.

7.12 LOW FUEL WARNING LIGHT SYSTEM

This aircraft incorporates a low fuel warning system that consists of two float switches, one in each tank, connected to a red warning light. Either float switch can activate the light independent of the other. The floats are positioned so that the light is activated with approximately 14 gallons (53 liters) usable quantity remaining (total in both wing tanks), if the aircraft is in level coordinated flight. An unbalanced fuel load (due to uncoordinated flight, flying all turns in one direction, or other cause), may result in fewer than 14 gallons (53 liters) usable at the time of warning light illumination. The fuel gauges are the primary instruments for fuel management, and the pilot should not use the warning light system as a means of determining the quantity of fuel remaining.

If the Low Fuel warning light illuminates, fly straight and level and monitor fuel gauges. Land as soon as practical. However, if fuel gauge monitoring indicates a fuel imbalance with adequate fuel remaining, flight may be continued after allowing fuel to transfer and equalize.

An intermittent (flickering) low fuel warning light should be treated the same as a steady warning light.

In section 3 (page 3-23) of the AFM, emergency procedures, the amplified procedures for the illumination of the warning lights and the caution lights are listed. For the low fuel warning light, it states, "if equipped" and provides the actions that the pilot would take in the event the low fuel warning light is illuminated.

<u>3.5.1 Warning Lights (Red)</u>	
<u>WARNING</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
Generator Out (If equipped)	Indicates generator is not charging normally. Monitor voltmeter, turn off non-essential electrical loads and check charging system.
Low Fuel (If equipped)	Indicates a low fuel condition in either or both wing fuel tanks. Fly straight and level and monitor fuel gauges. Land as soon as practical. However, if fuel gauge monitoring indicates a fuel imbalance with adequate fuel remaining, flight may be continued after allowing fuel to transfer and equalize. An intermittent (flickering) Low Fuel warning light should be treated the same as a steady warning light. SEE SECTION 7.12.

A review of the current Air Tractor AT-502B Owner's Manual did not reveal any information listed about the low fuel warning light system for the airplane.

A review of the current FAA Type Certificate Data Sheet A17SW, held by Air Tractor, did not reveal any information listed about the low fuel warning light system for the airplane.

The NTSB investigator-in-charge communicated with [REDACTED], an aviation safety investigator from Air Tractor, via email message on March 10, 2026, about the low fuel warning light system. He reported that the low fuel warning light system is not a required system for the airplane, but it is also not a customer option. Air Tractor has been installing the low fuel warning light system since serial number 502B-0478 (the accident airplane has serial number 502B-0471 and was manufactured in 1997). The information listed in the AFM, "if equipped," is there to cover any prior serial numbers that have the option to retrofit the low fuel warning light system.

The retrofit of the low fuel warning light system is encouraged in Air Tractor Service Letter 178 Imbalance of Fuel in Fuel Tanks (issued on April 8, 1999 and reissued on March 23, 2009) and Air Tractor Service Letter 178A Recommendations to Prevent Fuel Imbalance in Fuel Tanks for all Air Tractor Models (issued on June 18, 1999 and reissued on December 14, 2004). Both Air Tractor Service Letters apply to all models of Air Tractor airplanes.

The compliance with Air Tractor Service Letters is not mandated by the FAA for Part 137 aerial application operations.

*** Nothing Follows ***