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NTSB Air Safety Investigator

Investigator Gerhardt:

I attended the STOL Drag event at the Wayne Airport on Friday May 20, 2022. I am a FAA Aviation Safety Inspector, Operations, and I was on duty in support of the LNK FSDO FAASTeam. It was a mostly cool overcast sky with a gusty 26 knot wind out of the northwest. The event creator, Kevin Quinn, called a pilot meeting at 4:30pm outside near the pit area. Because there was little to no activity at my table, I attended the meeting along with FAA Inspectors Killingsworth, Weiss, and AST Chambers. Kevin Quinn stated that the winds were outside of the limits for STOL Drag and it was canceled for that afternoon and evening; however the weather for Saturday was looking favorable. He went on to say that with the winds right down the grass runway, they were going to do a "traditional STOL" instead of the STOL Drag. He told the pilots that they didn't have to fly. He stated that if you don't feel comfortable, you can sit this one out. He also requested that pilots don't "hang it on the prop" on their climb outs.

I ate dinner with the other LNK FSDO employees at a food truck at the airport. At that time we noticed that the firetruck and ambulance were still in position. It was discussed that because we were not doing the STOL Drag and not using the FAA waiver, they weren't required. However, we all agreed that it was safer to have them there, so we agreed not to say anything to the organizer. The four of us proceeded to the grass runway via a "Gator" type vehicle provided to us by the organizer, to observe the STOL. I was only 50 feet from the STOL line inside of the safety zone. Kevin Quinn was giving commands via radio. He divided the aircraft into different groups to fly a traffic pattern circuit. Pilots performed a short field takeoff, flew the pattern, performed a short field landing, and taxied clear to do it over again. The accident Cessna 140 was the last in a group of six aircraft following a Zenith 701. At some point I observed the ambulance leave the airport, but the firetruck remained.

I observed the accident Cessna 140 conduct several takeoffs and landings. The aircraft was by far using more distance on the takeoff roll than any of the other aircraft in that group. On one of the takeoffs I observed the pilot lifting the tail as soon as he could, which was good, but rotated too soon slamming the tailwheel on the ground, at which point the aircraft rolled another 50 or so feet before the main wheels lifted off of the ground. On all of the departures I observed the pilot pitching very high on the initial climb, then being forced to pitch the nose over and almost level off to gain airspeed. The engine appeared to sound normal throughout all of my observations.

On the accident pattern I remember seeing the Cessna 140 turn from base to final. The aircraft looked to be going very slow and appeared to be almost hovering as it followed the Zenith 701. The spacing also appeared to be tight between the Zenith 701 and the Cessna 140, and the Cessna 140 was lower than the Zenith 701. I looked away and then heard my co-worker Chris Chambers say "Oh No." I immediately looked back to the two aircraft and watched the Cessna 140 wing over to the right and enter a vertical

nose down decent to the ground. The aircraft impacted the ground and bounced once and landed on its nose with the tail in the air.

I yelled to Inspector Killingsworth that I was calling 911, because I knew the ambulance was gone. When the dispatcher answered, I gave him my name and identified myself as an FAA Inspector. I told him an airplane crashed at the Wayne Airport with one sole on board and to send an ambulance immediately. I was advised by the dispatcher that they were already dispatched. The pilot was declared deceased at the scene and his body was removed from the aircraft. The FAA ROC and the NTSB were notified. The aircraft wreckage was secured by local law enforcement a waiting arrival of the NTSB.

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