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Aviation Accident Investigator
Eastern Region

Date: March 19, 2024

Subject: ERA24LA124, Fire Department Personnel Interview

Contact: James Merrow and Hunter Stafford

First responders James Merrow and Hunter Stafford were interviewed on March 19 regarding the response to the accident of N485DA. The following is a summary of the in-person conversation.

Mr. Merrow stated that he was the Battalion Chief on duty at the time of the accident. His team was already on the accident site ramp attending to a previous, unrelated call. They were approximately 50 feet away from the accident location, but he and Mr. Stafford were sitting in their fire equipment vehicles. Mr. Merrow stated that at the time of the accident, he could hear the accident, but he did not see it. It sounded like an explosion. Mr. Merrow was asked if he could hear the engine prior to the impact and replied that he could not hear the engine, but he had his headset on. Mr. Merrow commented that he first saw the airplane when it was sliding, fully engulfed, towards the grass. He remembered seeing the door quickly open and all three occupants were out immediately.

Mr. Merrow was asked to provide his phone number and email address. He provided [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

Mr. Stafford also stated that he did not see the initial impact but heard the "explosion". He was sitting in his emergency vehicle, facing away from the direction of the accident airplane when he heard it. He was able to see the trail of fire from his mirror in the emergency vehicle and at this point he u-turned his vehicle around. When he turned around, the airplane was stopped, and the occupants were out. The airplane was "fully involved".

Both of the first responders described foaming the airplane to extinguish the fire. They were asked if they secured the airplane or manipulated any of the controls when the fire was extinguished. Mr. Stafford commented that he was able to cut the cable to the ballistic parachute with local maintenance personnel on the phone advising him. Mr. Stafford stated that he also went into the cockpit to secure it but pulling the throttle back and the mixture control knob. He manipulated the "fuel switch to the off position" and turned the ignition key to the off position. He removed the key from the ignition. He commented that everything was very foamy, and it was difficult to see where everything was inside of the cockpit area. Mr. Stafford was shown a picture of the cockpit, and he was able to verify the switches and controls he secured.