

National Transportation Safety Board

Office of Aviation Safety

Washington, DC 20594



ERA26LA062

WRECKAGE EXAMINATION

January 22, 2026

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A. ACCIDENT

Location: Pensacola, Florida
Date: December 07, 2025
Time: 17:30 CST
2330 UTC
Airplane: N6542H; Cessna 172M

B. WRECKAGE EXAMINATION

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C. SUMMARY

On December 07, 2025, at 1730 Central Standard Time, a Cessna 172M, N6542H, was substantially damaged when it was involved in an accident near Pensacola, Florida. The Private pilot and three passengers sustained minor injuries. The airplane was operated as a Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 91 personal flight.

D. DETAILS OF THE EXAMINATION

1.0 Airframe Examination

1.1 Fuselage

The fuselage remained intact. Impact damage to front left side of the fuselage aft of the firewall rivets, the skin was crushed inward towards the instrument panel. The windscreen was destroyed during the impact sequence. The roof was wrinkled and dented. The left-wing impact resulted in an inward dent above the aft left window.



Photo 1: View of the fuselage.

1.2 Empennage

The empennage exhibited tearing on the right side and was impact separated at the rivet line prior to the horizontal stabilizer. The horizontal and vertical stabilizer section remained attached to the empennage via the flight control cables, the flight control cables were cut to facilitate the recovery of the airplane. The vertical stabilizer exhibited impact crushing along the entire leading edge. The top of the rudder had impact damage, and the counterweight was impact separated. The rudder remained attached to the vertical stabilizer at all attachment points and the rudder trim tab remained attached and exhibited impact damage. Flight control continuity was established for the rudder from the flight control surface to the flight controls in the cockpit through a cut made by recovery personnel. The left horizontal stabilizer had aft impact crushing along the entire leading edge. The outboard 16 inches of the leading edge was impact bent down. The left elevator was impact bent up about mid span; the outboard 5 inches of the left elevator were impact bent down. The left elevator counterweight was impact separated. The left elevator remained attached at the two inboard attachment points. The outboard attachment point was impact separated. The right horizontal stabilizer remained attached and was impact damaged along the inboard 21 inches. The counterweight remained intact. The right elevator and elevator trim remained attached at all attachment points and were undamaged. Flight control continuity of the elevator was established from the flight control surface to the controls in the cockpit. Through a cut made by recovery personnel.



Photo 2: View of the right side of the empennage.



Photo 3: View of the left side of the empennage.



Photo 4: View of the vertical stabilizer and rudder.

1.3 Wings

The wings had been removed to facilitate recovery. The right wing had impact crushing aft along the entire leading edge. The inboard 40 inches of the right wing exhibited crumpling from the trailing edge towards the main wing spar. Control continuity was established from the right aileron flight control surface to the flight controls in the cockpit through cuts made during recovery. The right aileron and flap remained attached at all attachment points.



Photo 5: View of the right wing.



Photo 6: Damage to right wing root

The left wing exhibited aft impact crushing along the entire leading edge. The left wing outboard of the flap was impact separated and remained attached via control cables. Control continuity was established from the left aileron flight control surface to the flight controls in the cockpit through cuts made during recovery. The left aileron and flap remained attached at all attachment points.



Photo 7: View of the left wing.



Photo 8: View of the left wing damage.



Photo 9: Left outboard wing

1.4 Landing Gear

The nose wheel was impact separated. The main gear remained attached to the fuselage.



Photo 10: View of the nose landing gear that was impact separated.

1.5 Cockpit

The cockpit remained intact. The instrument panel was impact damaged. The Hobbs meter was found to show 782.8. Circuit breakers were all in. The following switch and lever positions were noted:

- Throttle: Full forward
- Mixture: Full forward
- Ignition: Both
- Master: OFF



Photo 11: View of the instrument panel.



Photo 12: Throttle quadrant

1.6 Survivability

The left front seat and bench seat remained installed and intact. The right front seat was impact separated from the rails and had damage to the attachment points.

All safety belts were intact, remained connected to the attachment points, and functioned properly.

1.7 Fuel/Fuel System

The left fuel cap was secured in the fuel filler opening, and no retention chain was present. The seal was present and pliable. The right fuel cap was secured in the fuel filler opening at the accident site and removed by recovery personnel to drain fuel prior to transport. The left and right fuel tank finger screens were examined and unobstructed. The fuel selector remained installed in the fuselage and was observed in the OFF position. Detents were present in each position of the selector. A fuel sample was taken at the strainer which remained attached to the firewall. The liquid was consistent with 100LL aviation fuel and was clear without sediment. The liquid was tested with water finding paste which found no evidence of water.



Photo 13: Fuel selector



Photo 14: Fuel drained from strainer

1.8 Other Systems

The ELT remained attached to its cradle and connected to the antenna.

Submitted by:

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