



RECORD OF CONVERSATION

Date:	April 15, 2019
Time:	About 1430-1530 Pacific daylight time
Location:	Telephone
Person Contacted:	Mr. Lance Gale, Airport Manager at ELY
Persons Present:	Mr. Mike Richards, National Transportation Safety Board Mr. Tom Little, National Transportation Safety Board
Subject:	Accident Investigation WPR19FA084

On April 15, 2019, at approximately 1430 Pacific daylight time (PDT), Mr. Mike Richards and Mr. Tom Little of the National Transportation Safety Board had a telephone conversation with Mr. Lance Gale. During the conversation Mr. Gale reported the following:

He is the Airport Manager for Ely Airport (ELY) in Ely, Nevada, and has been the airport manager for a little over two years. About every three days he checks status of the airport facilities (e.g., taxiways) and once a week he checks the airport systems (e.g., PAPIs, ASOS). He checks the ELY ASOS about once a week by listening to a hand-held radio, usually in the morning. The county is a sponsor of the airport and he reports items to them on a quarterly basis. He also reports items to a report advisory board, which usually meets every two to three months but is currently meeting every month.

On February 6, 2019, he noted that the ASOS was reporting erroneous visibility, which he reported to the National Weather Service (NWS) office in Elko. On February 10, 2019, the ASOS was working properly and he assumed that the NWS had physically come to ELY to fix the issue, possibly as early as February 8, 2019. He assumed the NWS came to ELY in-person to fix the issue because the ASOS is on a secured part of the airport, but he did not see them himself. On February 12, 2019, the NWS sent a notice that the ASOS was repaired. On March 12, 2019, he noted that the ASOS visibility was erroneous and that it was reporting appropriately on March 15, 2019. Mr. Gale stated that the NWS from Elko is phenomenal about responding quickly to issues with the ELY ASOS. As best as he can recall, the visibility reporting issues with the ELY ASOS began in mid-2018, and the NWS from Elko have been out to ELY about 4-5 times in response to calls on this issue but have been out to ELY for maintenance more than that. Every time they come out to address the visibility reporting problem it is a "parts issue."

He has received reports from pilots about the ELY ASOS visibility being different than what they were experiencing. Two companies that operate medical flights into ELY are MedX AirOne and American Medflight.

The only time he has done a NOTAM on the ASOS is when it went completely down for two days due to maintenance. For that NOTAM he called the FAA NOTAM phone number.

He has not had concerns with the ELY ASOS reporting of sky condition and he has no idea if the visibility reporting issues have affected the snow intensity reporting (e.g., “light” versus “heavy”)

On the day of the accident it had gotten darker early and snow had been kicking in and out. He was out plowing snow on the airport and he had his handheld radio with him. The storm had subsided for a moment, but then in no time he could not see the end of the runway; he estimated the visibility of 1/2 miles. He heard an aircraft speaking on the UNICOM frequency, and his associate Tim tried two or three times to get in touch with the aircraft via UNICOM but received no response. The weather stayed bad for about 30-45 minutes. All of this occurred in the 1700-1715 timeframe. He started plowing at about 1630, at which point he estimated the clouds were about 5,000 feet above ground level with a visibility of 3-5 miles.

To turn on the runway lights you must key the microphone three times and to turn the lights off you must key the microphone six times. Four or five microphone clicks will adjust the intensity of the runway lights. The runway lights were on when he was out on the airport during the sequence with the aircraft speaking on UNICOM and he did not see the runway lights go off.

He can guarantee that the wind shift observed in the ELY ASOS disseminated observations around the accident time is accurate.

He did not know about the accident until he found out about it on the following Monday from the television news.

Conversation ended at approximately 1530 PDT.

Mike Richards
Senior Meteorologist
Operational Factors Division
National Transportation Safety Board