2 killed in plane crash

- NTSB, local officials investigating
- Identities of occupants not released

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A man and a woman were killed Saturday morning in a single-engine plane crash in a heavily wooded area at the northwestern edge of Purdue University's Ackerman Hills Golf Course. Tippecanoe County coroner Donna Avolt had not positively identified the victims Saturday evening, Purdue officials said, declining to release any additional information about the pair. The two were the only occupants of the aircraft.

Police received a 911 call at 5:42 a.m. from a resident along McCormick Road who said he had heard the sound of a laboring airplane engine and then a boom.

Purdue police searched the area near McCormick Road and Cherry Lane for nearly two hours before finding the plane's wreckage at 7 a.m., in the tree line of McCormick Woods, adjacent to Purdue's Ackerman Hills Golf Course.

"Visually, it's hard to tell it's even an airplane," Joseph Bennett, vice president for university relations, said of the mangled fuselage.

The 1975 Piper Arrow PA28-200 four-seat plane, belonging to Lafayette Aviation Inc. of Lafayette, Ind., was observed by a flight instructor taking off from Purdue's airport on runway 10 about 5:40 a.m., said Ed Malinowski, air safety investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board.

It's "still too early" to say what may have caused the crash, he said.

Officials from the NTSB and Federal Aviation Administra-

tion will continue to investigate the crash. The plane's wreckage was moved to a Purdue airport hangar for the duration of the investigation.

"The three main things we look at are the weather at the time, the pilot's background and the aircraft," Malinowski said, acknowledging the skies had been overcast all day.

"We will look at the weather at the time. That's not perishable evidence; there was a record of it at that time. Right now, our main concern is looking at information that's perishable."

Malinowski said he had no information about the witness's 911 call possibly indicating the plane's engine trouble. He was also unaware of any distress calls made by the pilot or his passenger.

"The control tower is closed at that time," Malinowski said, referring to the early morning flight. "And I don't think they reported anything, but we'll review with the FAA if they did report any indication they were in distress."

This is the fifth fatal crash at or near the airport since it was established in 1930, when Purdue became the first university in the country to operate its own such facility. Lafayette Aviation is a private company that provides a charter, rental and flight training service at the university's airport. The company owns 13 planes — 12 single-engine planes similar to the Piper Arrow, which is valued at $85,000, and one small plane, Lafayette Aviation president Jeff Pitter said.

The company also was investigating the crash, he said, declining to release specific information about it. "We were told he was going to be doing touch-and- go... landings and take-offs," Pitter said of the pilot.

More on the plane crash

Seeking answers: Investigators study all factors to determine what caused the Piper to malfunction / A4

Looking back: A history of local fatal plane crashes / A4

On the Net
- Aircraft Owners and Pilots Assn. Air Safety Foundation accident database
  www.aopa.org/astf
- Federal Aviation Administration Accident Reports:
  www.faa.gov/aviation/accidents/
- Lafayette Aviation:
  www.lafayetteaviation.com
- Purdue University Airport:
  http://www.purdue.edu/PhysFac/airport