

San Francisco Chronicle

4 killed, including 12-year-old boy, in small plane crash in Concord

[Demian Bulwa, Marisa Lagos and Henry K. Lee, Chronicle Staff Writers](#)

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(12-21) 16:09 PST CONCORD -- A 12-year-old boy who survived a small plane crash that killed three others died this afternoon.

The crash occurred at 11 a.m. when the pilot of a small private plane apparently misjudged the landing approach to Concord Buchanan Field, struck Highway 4 and crashed into the roadway, officials said.

The pilot was attempting for the second time to land in cloudy, rainy weather, authorities said.

No one on the ground was injured, said Federal Aviation Administration spokesman Ian Gregor. Initial reports that the plane had struck a dump truck and crashed into the airfield turned out to be wrong, officials said.

The identities of the dead weren't immediately released. Records show that the plane was built in 1989 and has been registered since 1999 to John Frank Mauricio of Las Vegas.

The boy, who was conscious when rescuers found him, later died at John Muir Medical Center in Walnut Creek after undergoing emergency surgery, said California Highway Patrol Officer Scott Yox.

There were four people onboard the six-seat, single-engine plane, a Piper PA-46 Malibu - two women, a man and the boy.

"When it came in, it appeared to have made too low of an approach, and according to witnesses and evidence on the scene, it struck the freeway," he said.

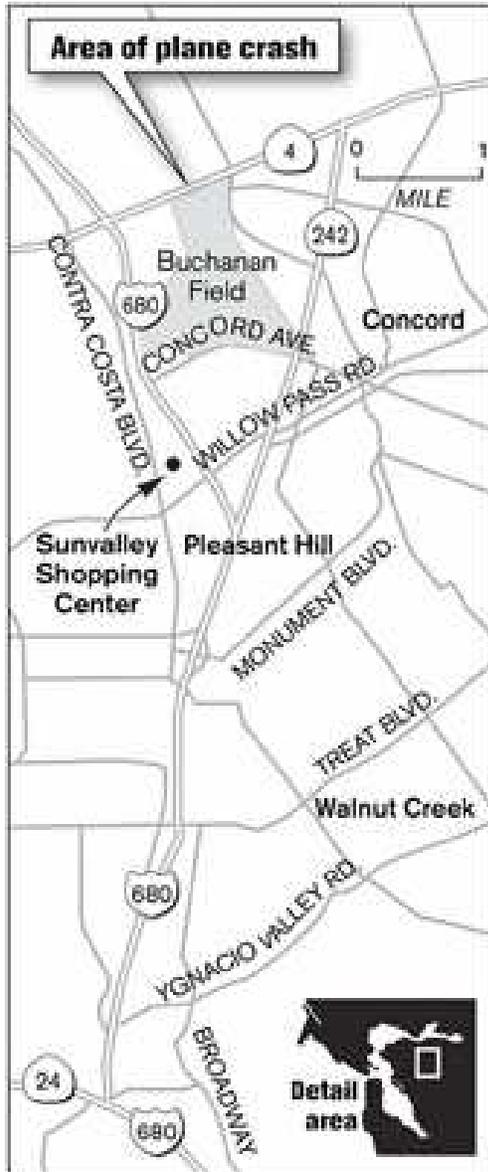
The plane hit the ground between the east and westbound sides of the highway, tumbled across the roadway and came to rest on the south side of the eastbound lanes, less than 100 feet from Highway 4 and near a chain link fence that borders nearby Marsh Drive. The plane went down at least 1,000 feet from the tip of the runway, Yox said.

Rescue personnel from the airport and the Contra Costa County Fire Department found the plane engulfed in a raging fire, Yox said. They put out the fire, keeping it from the passenger compartment, entered the plane and removed two people: a deceased man and the boy.

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2006/12/21/BAG1VN3U9J4.DTL>

Yox said the boy, who was found between the front pilot seats and the back passenger seats, was alert and conscious, but had suffered blunt force trauma and broken bones. He was able to respond to rescuers, he said.

"He knew it was the holiday season," Yox said.



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Traffic was affected throughout the day as a result of the crash, with motorists slowing in the rain to take look at the spectacle. The two eastbound lanes of Highway 4, which abuts the airport, were expected to be closed until 7p.m. or 8 p.m., authorities said.

Around 2:30 p.m., officials from the Contra Costa County Coroner's office were removing the bodies from the scene. Debris still littered the roadway, and the smell of the plane's fuel lingered in the air.

The plane was covered with a red tarp to preserve the scene.

The plane had taken off from Montgomery Field in San Diego around 9 a.m., said Henry Sickels, general manager of Gibbs Flying Service, a fixed-base operation at the airport that handles between 50 and 100 departures a day.

Sickels said the pilot was a regular Gibbs customer but was not based in San Diego.

"He's a frequent transient customer -- he's here often, I don't know where he comes from," Sickels said. "There was nothing abnormal about any of it. He's a normal customer and he got on the airplane and departed. Nothing was unusual."

Yox said Concord airport officials were unsure why the pilot aborted his first attempt to land at the airfield.

Gary Reardon, an assistant office manager at Lithia Dodge Concord, next to the airport and Highway 4, said he was standing outside in one of the service bays with another employee when he heard an engine and looked up.

"There are always planes coming over the dealership, since we're right next to the airport," he said. "I kind of saw a plane that looked like it was coming in at a steep angle - it was banking hard to get to one of the runways. I mentioned to the service manager, 'That guy is coming in steep' -- then the plane disappeared behind some trees, and the service manager said, 'Oh my God, it crashed!' We saw a ball of fire and black smoke.

"It was a very scary, very surreal moment."

The crash happened two days before the 21st anniversary of the Dec. 23, 1985, disaster that occurred when a plane trying to land at the same airfield crashed into nearby Sunvalley Mall, killing seven people and injuring 78.

On April 13, 2004, a Piper Turbo plane crashed shortly after leaving Buchanan Field.

No one was killed, but the plane landed on a minivan and nearly severed the left leg of Arianna Jimenez, then 12, who was in the vehicle. Officials determined the crash was the fault of a mechanic who had worked on the plane.

In October, Arianna received a \$820,000 settlement from the county, a plane parts manufacturer, the mechanic and the pilot, said her family's attorney, Gerald Sterns of Oakland.

E-mail the writers at dbulwa@sfgate.com, mlagos@sfgate.com and hlee@sfgate.com.



Chronicle / Christina Koci Hernandez

The pilot of the plane tried to land at Concord Buchanan Field in cloudy, rainy weather, before it crashed, authorities said. Chronicle photo by Chrstina Koci Hernandez



Chronicle / Christina Koci Hernandez

Yellow tarp covers the body of one of three adults who were killed when a small plane crashed in Concord on Thursday. Chronicle photo by Chrstina Koci Hernandez



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The airplane burst into flames after it crashed at Highway 4 in Concord. Chronicle photo by Chrstina Koci Hernandez