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# Details emerge in U-M jet loss

## New report shows control problems

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**BY BEN SCHMITT**  
 FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Two transmissions: An emergency after takeoff and a struggle to control the plane as it plunges toward Lake Michigan.

At one point, a pilot orders his partner to grab the plane's controls, so he could pull circuit breakers.

ADVERTISEMENT   At another point, a pilot radios in that the plane's trim system, which stabilizes the plane, is malfunctioning.

A preliminary report released Thursday by the National Transportation Safety Board shows the pilots of a University of Michigan organ transplant flight struggled to control the twin-engine Cessna soon after takeoff, before it crashed off the Milwaukee shoreline.

The case carrying the cockpit voice recorder was severely damaged, according to the report. However, "the information indicated that the flight crew had difficulty with the directional control of the airplane shortly after takeoff," the report says.

The findings support previous indications that problems with the trim system played a major role in the crash.

The six people onboard were killed about 5:10 p.m. June 4 when the plane nose-dived into Lake Michigan near Milwaukee. The team was transporting lungs from a 48-year-old stroke victim to a 50-year-old patient in Ann Arbor.

The Ann Arbor patient eventually received another set of lungs.

Keith Holloway, an NTSB spokesman, said Thursday that the final report could take up to 18 months to be completed.

Thursday's update also gives details of the plane's short flight. The plane climbed for about one minute, leveled off for 16 seconds at 3,900 feet, then climbed again for 30 seconds to 4,400 feet.

Authorities have reported that the plane hit the water at about 190 m.p.h.

### PHOTOS

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(KATHLEEN GALLIGAN/DFP)

Officer Frank Stahl of the Cudahy Police Department in Wisconsin recovers items June 7 from the U-M organ transplant flight crash. The pilots struggled to control the plane soon after takeoff, a new report says.

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A review of air traffic control communications and radar data shows that the flight crew reported an emergency shortly after taking off from Milwaukee. One pilot was overheard telling the other pilot to hold the controls so he could pull circuit breakers, the report says.

A pilot described an aeronautical term known as a "runaway trim" just before the crash, according to the report. An aircraft's trim controls affect its pitch and left to right movement.

"The board will continue to assess the significance of these settings," the report states.

Stuart Dingman, who owns Belleville-based Marlin Air, which contracts with U-M for all of its Survival Flights and provides the pilots, declined to comment on the NTSB update.

He previously declined to speculate on problems with the trim system, but said the plane's maintenance records were impeccable.

Brian Alexander, an attorney from New York who handles aviation cases, reviewed Thursday's report and said a trim problem still appears to be the leading cause of the crash.

"My early speculation would be a combination of some malfunction with the trim system and then the human factor side," said Alexander, an ex-pilot. "Nothing here is inconsistent with a trim anomaly of some sort."

NTSB spokesman Holloway said the board has a team working on a complete transcript of the 30-minute recording from the cockpit voice recorder.

Killed in the crash were Dr. Martinus Spoor, 37, of Ann Arbor; Richard Chenault II, 44, of Ann Arbor; Dr. David Ashburn, 35, of Dexter; Ricky LaPensee, 48, of Van Buren Township; copilot Dennis Hoyes, 65, of Blackman Township, and pilot Bill Serra, 59, of Macomb Township.

Searchers located most of the wreckage in about 60 feet of water.

Various flight control instruments have been discovered and are being tested.

The NTSB plans to set up a Cessna Citation II flight simulator to explore failure scenarios.

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