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## Hawaii Air Ambulance hopes to complete voluntary inspections of three of its four remaining Cessna... Cessna inspections nearly

Hawaii Air Ambulance hopes to complete voluntary inspections of three of its four remaining Cessna 414 airplanes and have them back in the air within a day or two, company president and CEO Andrew Kluger said yesterday.

After the fatal crash on Wednesday of an Air Ambulance plane on Maui, the company temporarily grounded its fleet of aircraft to undergo voluntary safety inspections in hopes of bolstering confidence in the planes on the part of company employees, crew members and general public, Kluger said.

He said he hoped two of the planes would be test flown yesterday and placed back into service, but he put off testing so the inspection process wouldn't be rushed.

Killed in the crash were pilot Peter Miller, 32, of Kailua; assistant chief flight nurse Brien Eisaman, 37, of Waipahu; and Marlana Yomes, 39, a mobile intensive care technician from Wai'anae.

Rick Fried, an attorney hired by the Yomes family to investigate the accident, said he has spoken to witnesses of the crash, including an airplane mechanic, as well as an investigator with Hawaii Air Ambulance's insurance company. He said the early indication is that the plane may have been a victim of wake turbulence from a larger aircraft landing ahead of it. He wants to know if the tower at Kahului airport positioned the Cessna too close to a larger commercial jet, which he said would create hazardous turbulence behind it as it landed.

Fried asked the NTSB and the FAA to retain tower records of what planes landed that evening ? something he said both agencies would be doing anyway.

He said one witness saw a commercial jet land while another witness did not see one. He also said the Cessna was forced to make a last-minute runway change to the north ? from Runway 2 to Runway 5.

Several witnesses said the Cessna appeared to abort its approach, circling over the

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Kahului commercial area for another attempt when something went wrong.

That would fit with reports that the plane was nearly inverted when it made the runway change. Fried said witnesses said the plane banked on its left wing nearly 80 degrees.

"Certainly that is not something an experienced pilot would do with the aircraft," he said. "We've heard nothing about any unusual winds at Kahului, though we all know it is a pretty windy airport. It was probably less than normal that particular evening."

Neither the pilot nor those aboard the Cessna reported any problems before the runway change. But Fried said the tower received a garbled communication from the pilot just before impact.

"She was supposed to have been done working already but they said that the man in Maui was critical and that if they didn't get him to O'ahu he would have passed, so they asked her and she went ahead with the flight," Moniz said.

That she said yes was of no surprise to the family. Yomes loved her job, even when it kept her away from home for two or three days in a row. She'd sleep at the air ambulance offices to be ready for a flight the next morning.

They had weathered much in the past four years, ever since Gilbert was diagnosed with a brain tumor that was supposed to kill him in six months.

He went through chemotherapy and the couple renewed their vows. They made another promise, too, said Yomes' father, Robert Moniz, who sat beside his son yesterday.

Kluger would not speculate on what caused the Maui crash. He said the plane was 28 years old and the remaining four airplanes in the Hawaii Air Ambulance fleet are about the same age.

He emphasized that the Federal Aviation Administration does not place a limit on the length of time an airplane may remain in service. Instead, the FAA requires periodic inspection of airplanes to ensure they are airworthy.

As long as an airplane is properly maintained, it can be used indefinitely, Kluger said. The type of engines on the plane that crashed had a service life of 1,600 hours, under FAA rules, and each engine had accumulated about 800 hours, Kluger said.

Hawaii Air Ambulance has continued to provide service since the crash, conducting 27 missions as of Sunday night. Due to the voluntary inspections and groundings, those missions were undertaken using U.S. Coast Guard or chartered planes, Kluger said.

He acknowledged that one of the company's Cessnas was used for a medical mission on Thursday, but said that flight took place before the voluntary grounding was ordered.

Kluger said the company is fully cooperating with the ongoing investigation into the Maui crash. Hawaii Air Ambulance's chief of operations Stephen Henley was at the Maui crash site the same evening it happened to assist investigators and the company

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has assigned a full-time employee to serve as a member of the official investigation team, Kluger said.

He said the plane was returning from Kaua'i when the pilot began to experience control problems but was able to land at Dillingham Airfield in Mokule'ia. An inspection showed that an "aileron push rod" had slipped off, leaving the pilot with only one working aileron to steer the plane.

Also, within the past six months, one of the airplanes shot out a "plume of flame" several feet long out the exhaust port shortly after the engine was started. While somewhat unusual, the incident did not result in any damage to the plane, Henley said.

The plane that crashed on Maui was not the one that had the aileron problem or the backfire problem, Henley said. Nor was pilot Peter Miller, who was killed in the Maui crash, involved in either incident.

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