

Feds issue prelim findings on separate fatal air crashes in Kansas

By Rick Plumlee The Wichita Eagle Updated Monday, April 28, 2014, at 3:03 p.m.

Don Dahl, a former state representative from Hillsboro, was killed April 18 when his ultra-light plane crashed near his hometown, a Kansas Highway Patrol report said.

Don Cates was killed April 22 when his crop-dusting plane crashed after striking a power line near Garfield in Pawnee County.

A former state legislator from Hillsboro had difficulty starting the ultra-light plane before he was killed when the aircraft crashed shortly after takeoff, according to federal investigators.

It was one of two separate crashes that killed prominent Kansans within a span of five days earlier this month. Preliminary reports have been released by the National Transportation Safety Board.

Don Dahl, who served in the House from 1997 to 2008, was killed April 18 when the ultra-light he was piloting crashed about two miles south of Hillsboro. Barton County Commissioner Don Cates was killed April 22 when his crop-dusting plane struck a power line and crashed near Garfield in Pawnee County.

Dahl, 69, a former Navy pilot, was planning to fly the ultra-light from a private grass strip to the Hillsboro airport, the report said. [Friendstold The Eagle he was moving](#) the plane there for an estate sale the next day.

According to the NTSB report:

A witness told investigators that Dahl had assembled the plane. When the engine didn't start, he poured fuel into the carburetor and the engine started.

"When the airplane taxied down the runway to prepare for takeoff, the airplane veered off the grass strip," the report said. Dahl repositioned the plane and took off with good visibility conditions.

After takeoff, the plane made a steep right turn to the north but didn't appear to gain altitude. The plane collided with a 15-foot tall tree shortly before 2 p.m.

Dahl was ejected from the cockpit, and the plane continued into a pond.

The witness said the plane's engine sounded the same throughout the flight and didn't appear to be malfunctioning, the report said.

The preliminary report for Cates' [fatal crash was similar](#) to the Kansas Highway Patrol's initial accident report.

According to NTSB's report:

A witness, who hired Cates — a 67-year-old veteran pilot — to spray a hay field for weevils, was standing at his window when he saw the single-engine plane start its first pass from south to north. Visibility was good.

The witness saw a puff of smoke about 1:30 p.m. when the plane struck a set of power lines that ran east and west along the field. A Federal Aviation Administration inspector said the top line was a 3-inch-wide static cable.

The plane went down behind a power line and hit a road. There was no fire.

It will take up to a year before final investigation reports will be issued on both crashes.