Beat: Travel

U.S.: Firefighting plane crashes at Yosemite National Park, killing pilot

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USPA News - A firefighting plane crashed in a mountainous area of northern California on Tuesday while en-route to Yosemite National Park to battle a wildfire there, killing the only person on board the airtanker, state officials said Wednesday. The accident happened at around 4:30 p.m. local time on Tuesday when the twin-engine S-2F3AT aircraft slammed into the side of a mountain near the entrance to Yosemite National Park.

The airtanker was flying to an area known as Dog Rock where a wildfire had broken out at around 2:45 p.m. and quickly spread to engulf more than 130 acres (52.6 hectares). Daniel Berlant, a spokesman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE), said rescue workers were able to access the crash site several hours later and determined the pilot had been killed. He said the aircraft, known as Tanker 81 and registered with tail number N449DF, was based out of Hollister Air Attack Base. "This crash underscores just how inherently dangerous wildland firefighting is and the job is further compounded this year by extreme fire conditions," said CAL FIRE Chief Ken Pimlott. "We have secured the crash site and will be cooperating with the NTSB (National Transportation Safety Board) on their investigation." The family of the victim requested his or her identity to be withheld until all family members had been notified. "Our thoughts and prayers are with the pilot`s family during this difficult time," added Jeff Cavarra of DynCorp International, the company which employed the pilot and maintains CAL FIRE`s firefighting planes. Ian Gregor, a spokesman for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said both the FAA and the NTSB would investigate the cause of Tuesday`s crash. "Investigators from both agencies expect to arrive on site Wednesday morning. NTSB is the lead investigative agency," he said. "It typically takes NTSB months to come up with a probable cause for accidents." Yosemite National Park, a World Heritage Site and known for its spectacular granite cliffs, waterfalls and biological diversity, draws nearly 4 million visitors from around the world each year.

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