

Two dead, 181 injured in San Francisco plane crash

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On Saturday, Asiana Airlines flight 214 crash landed at San Francisco International Airport, killing 2 and injuring 181, including 49 critically injured. Details regarding this tragic incident are still emerging.

According to what is known so far, at 11:47 a.m. the plane was close to landing when the pilot realized the aircraft was approaching too slowly and could potentially miss the tarmac. The pilot decided to abort the descent. However, he was too late. The most recent report indicates that a split second later, the plane landed on an emergency extension of the tarmac. The aircraft landed too short and the tail of the plane hit the seawall which protects the runway from the San Francisco Bay. After this the plane bounced back up in the air, fell down again, and then proceeded to skid on its belly across the runway.

By the time the plane came to rest, its wings had broken off and its remaining jet fuel had burst into flames. Most were able to make it to safety before the fire engulfed the aircraft. Fortunately, the airplane only had 90 minutes of fuel left. According to witnesses, the scene was orderly as people slid down the emergency exit slides. According to one report, the seatbelts of some passengers had to be cut with a knife.

Of the 307 people on board, many were injured, including 49 critically. Two of the critically injured are reported to be paralyzed due to spinal injuries. Photographs of the crashed plane show much of the interior gutted completely by fire. Many of the injuries resulted from the top of the plane crashing down on passengers. Those in the back of the plane suffered worst.

The deceased were two teenage girls, Ye Mengyuan and Wang Linjia. Both were with a larger group of Chinese students coming to a summer camp outside of Los Angeles in West Hills, California. The girls had

been sitting at the back of the airplane and could have been hurt when the plane's tail snapped off.

One of the two girls is believed to have been killed when she was ejected from the plane as it crashed. A San Francisco medical examiner indicated that the death of the other girl might have been caused by an emergency vehicle running her over while it rushed to the scene. An autopsy was being done late Sunday to investigate this possibility.

The flight, run by Asiana, a South Korean airline, was an overnighter that went from Shanghai to Seoul before coming to San Francisco. Aboard were 141 Chinese nationals, 77 South Koreans, 61 Americans, and 28 people from several other countries. In a press conference, the president of the airline, Yoon Young-doo announced that "there were no problems caused by the 777-200 plane or engines." He described the pilots as "veterans" and "skilled," with tens of thousands of hours logged flying.

According to the *New York Times*, the South Korean Transport Ministry has indicated that the co-pilot, Lee Kang-guk, was at the controls at the time of the crash. Lee Kang-guk had only 43 hours of experience flying the Boeing 777.

Glide Path, an automatic instrument landing system, had been turned off for several weeks at San Francisco International Airport. According to a Reuters report, Glide Path "is meant to help planes land in bad weather."

"Aircraft safety experts said Glide Path was far from essential for routine landings, and it was not unusual for airports to take such landing systems off line for maintenance or other reasons," the report indicated. However, the news agency reported that many pilots have grown accustomed to the technology and relied on it during landings. At this time, the relationship

between the switch-off of the Glide Path technology (due to construction) and the crash is not known.

The crash caused widespread delay. Flights taking off and landing at San Francisco International were diverted to Oakland International Airport and San Jose International Airport. Local reporters found passengers still waiting for their flights after 8 or 9 hour delays. Many were delayed longer and had to take shelter at the airport or pay for hotels.

According to an NBC report, local hotels are taking advantage of stranded passengers with rates of up to \$1,200 per night for hotel rooms with normal rates of \$100 to \$200 per night. A Los Angeles International Airport executive said it would take two days before flights between Los Angeles and San Francisco returned to normal.

The “black boxes” of the aircraft have been recovered and are being processed. The pilots, who survived, have not yet made any public statements. There has been no official determination as to whether the crash was a result of pilot error or a mechanical problem. Nor has it been determined whether there were any safety violations or other system failures that could have contributed to the crash.

The National Transportation Safety Board, which is overseeing the investigation, indicated that it could take months until the causes and reasons behind the crash are fully understood.



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