

Boeing cargo plane returns to Miami airport after engine catches fire

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20 January 2024

A Boeing cargo plane operated by Atlas Air and bound for Puerto Rico caught fire Thursday night shortly after takeoff in Miami and returned for an emergency landing.

According to data maintained by FlightAware, the Boeing 747-8 left the gate at 10:11pm. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said the cargo plane returned to Miami International Airport at approximately 10:30 pm. A statement by Atlas Air on Friday said Flight 5Y095 landed safely after experiencing an “engine malfunction” following departure.

A 21-second cell phone video taken on the ground by a bystander has been shared widely on social media. It shows flames trailing from the engine on the left wing of the jet. One of the witnesses, who appears to be a youth, exclaims, “Oh my god, it’s on fire!”

Scripps News obtained a copy of the audio communication between the pilot of the flight and the control tower. The pilot says, “Mayday, mayday, flight 095. We have an engine fire. Request access back to the airport.”

The FAA reported that a post-flight inspection showed “a softball-size hole above the engine,” and said it is investigating the incident. The National Transportation Safety Administration said it “has opened an investigation and is collecting information to evaluate and determine scope of the investigation.”

Atlas Air, which operates 110 aircraft, is based in Purchase, New York and reportedly operates the world’s largest fleet of Boeing 747s. The company said its crew followed all standard procedures and made a safe return to Miami. The airline also said, “At Atlas, safety is always our top priority, and we will be conducting a thorough inspection.” The company has not disclosed what was in the cargo being transported

to San Juan, Puerto Rico from Miami, Florida.

Boeing sent a statement to Scripps News that said it is supporting the Atlas Air investigation, adding, “We are supporting our customer and will support the [NTSB] investigation into this incident.”

The manufacturer of the four Boeing 747 cargo plane’s engines, GE Aviation, issued a statement saying, “Safety is our first priority, and GE Aerospace is providing technical assistance to [the FAA] and the National Transportation Safety Board as they investigate the incident.”

Air safety expert John Cox told Reuters that problems with one engine is generally not a significant event, but the incident sounded like an uncontained engine failure. “On the interior of that engine there are a lot of rotating parts, including blades,” Cox said. “An engine is designed to try and contain a blade separation and they do testing and certification for it. But it does happen that you get an uncontained failure. When you do, it does elevate the investigative significance of it.”

Cox said incidents of uncontained engine failures, like a 2018 Southwest Airlines flight in which a passenger was partially sucked out the window, are coming under increased scrutiny. Other airline experts have said that an object can go into an engine causing this type of failure, such as material on the runway or a bird in the air.

The engine failure in a relatively young Boeing 747—the plane was manufactured in 2015—follows by less than two weeks a midair door panel blowout on a 737 MAX 9 passenger flight bound for Ontario, California from Portland, Oregon on January 5.

The failure of the plug in an unused fuselage door opening happened as the plane was climbing. Although the aircraft depressurized, no one was injured. The six-member crew returned the 171 passengers safely to

Portland International Airport.

In response, the FAA ordered the temporary grounding of 171 Boeing 737 MAX 9 planes pending a thorough inspection of each one. On Wednesday, the FAA said the initial round of 40 inspections of the planes had been completed but that the models were still being grounded until the agency signed off on the procedures being used to inspect the planes.

The FAA has also said it is planning an audit of Boeing's 737 MAX 9 production line and suppliers. Meanwhile, problems with jets made by Boeing continue to take place. On Saturday, a 737-800 operated by All Nippon Airways reversed course in Japan because of a crack in its windshield.

On Wednesday, a Boeing aircraft scheduled to transport Secretary of State Antony Blinken back to the US from Switzerland was grounded because of a "critical failure" related to an oxygen leak.

Boeing has lost nearly 14 percent of its stock market value since the 737 MAX 9 door plug blowout on January 5. In the first nine months of 2023, Boeing took a net loss of \$2.2 billion, on top of a total \$5.05 billion loss for all of 2022.



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