

One person dead after light plane crash near Cessnock

By Helen Gregory July 9, 2015, 7 a.m.



Police at the scene of the reportedly fatal plane crash. Photo: Jonathan Carroll

A man has died after his light plane crashed and burst into flames on a Lower Hunter property.

Emergency services were called to the crash scene off Old Maitland Road at Sawyers Gully about 4.30pm on Wednesday, after receiving multiple reports from witnesses – including some drivers on the nearby Hunter Expressway – who had seen the plane spiral into dense bushland, followed by plumes of smoke.

Emergency crews had to use four-wheel-drive vehicles to access the remote site, where they found the plane alight. Firefighters extinguished the flames before the body of the pilot was found inside the aircraft.

Royal Newcastle Aero Club chief pilot and chief flying instructor Phil Unicomb said the man was his friend and former student and had been a member of the club.

"He was flying his own aeroplane, a Pitts Special, and was not a participant in the [Hunter Valley Air] show on the weekend," Mr Unicomb said.

"It's a little close to the bone, it's very early in the whole thing so we must not speculate too much as to what's happened. We'll know a whole lot more in time."

"The club is responding with great sadness - it's pretty dreadful."

Club president Chris Hirst said his partner Ruth Linstrom was at their Bishop Grove Wines business when she saw the plane performing aerobatics.

Ms Linstrom said she saw the plane flying straight up into the air, before it started to drop tail-first towards the ground.

"The pilot had a fair bit of height but then it started tumbling out of control, circling around like a spiral towards the ground," Ms Linstrom said. "I was watching, just hoping it would recover, but it just didn't come back.

"It disappeared out of sight and I heard a big boom. Then the fuel tank went up a bit later on."

Police established a crime scene, which would be examined by specialist forensic officers.

A report on the incident will also be prepared for the coroner.

Extracted from:

<http://www.maitlandmercury.com.au/story/3198572/one-person-dead-after-light-plane-crash-near-cessnock/?cs=12>

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