

Rodney Collen's single-engine aircraft went off radar shortly after takeoff from **Tacoma** Narrows Airport on March 6, prompting an ongoing aerial search over densely wooded territory near the coast roughly 150 northwestern driving miles away.

A secondary radar tracked Collen's 2006 Cessna T182T Turbo Skylane to an area between the unincorporated community of Queets and Lake Quinault and showed it made a "very rapid descent to the ground," according to the Washington State Department of Transportation. The search for Collen and his plane, confined to 36 square miles near Queets, entered its 12th day on Friday.

Collen, who was a subject of a **News Tribune** profile last year as the creator of a mushroom-shaped home on the Key Peninsula, is an experienced pilot, according to **news** reports. He was only a couple of minutes into his 5:35 p.m. departing flight from the Gig Harbor airport when his plane's Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast system stopped.

Authorities don't know whether it was turned off or malfunctioned, WSDOT said.

While circumstances surrounding the seasoned flier's disappearance remain unclear, single-engine plane accidents happen more often in Washington than in most other states, a **News Tribune** analysis found. Yet the safety record for general aviation, which predominantly consists of single-engine aircraft, has improved across the country.

Nationwide, the number of general aviation accidents has declined over the past 20 years, according to National Transportation Safety Board data. There were 5.2 accidents per 100,000 flight hours in 2021, down from nearly 6.7 in 2002.

The NTSB uses the term "accident" - distinguishing it from "incident" - to refer to any occurrence where someone is killed or seriously injured or an aircraft is substantially damaged.

Since 2012, Washington ranks seventh in the country for accidents and incidents specifically involving single-engine planes, according to a **News Tribune** analysis of NTSB data. Richard McSpadden, the senior vice president of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association's Air Safety Institute, said that might be attributed in part to difficult weather and more activity due to Washington's robust aviation community.

McSpadden said that single-engine aircraft, at large, have a strong safety record. As the most active plane in general aviation - an industry that encompasses any civilian flying that isn't airline- or military-related - they're used for activities that range from private travel to agricultural crop-dusting.

"That's why you hear about single-engine accidents more," he said.

Each year over the past decade, the number of single-engine plane accidents in Washington has fluctuated, The **News Tribune's** analysis found.

From 2012 to 2022, there were no fewer than 23 (2015 and 2020) and no more than 40 (2018) investigated by the NTSB, which is tasked with probing every civil aviation accident in the United States.

In 77% of those accidents, no one was hurt or there were only minor injuries reported, the analysis showed.

Last year, however, saw 18 fatalities in single-engine aircraft accidents - the most in Washington in at least a decade, according to the analysis.

That figure was amplified by the September seaplane crash off Whidbey Island that killed 10 people, including a civil rights activist. In October, NTSB officials said they found that a tail part that controls the pitch of the plane - its up and down movement - had separated into two pieces and may have resulted in loss of control.

In Washington, the vast majority of all general aviation accidents between 2012 and 2021 occurred during landing and due to a loss of control on the ground, according to NTSB's accident dashboard. Most often, fatalities were reported in accidents that happened en route due to loss of control in-flight.

Collen's plane type, the T182T, is among the most popular in general aviation, McSpadden said.

The 29-foot-long plane is relatively simple to fly, comfortably seats four people, has a powerful engine, can land on short runways and can fly or land at slow speeds, McSpadden said. While it isn't an aircraft that a novice would likely learn to fly in, it's not a difficult next step up.

The plane type also maintains a strong safety record, according to McSpadden, who added that the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association is constantly pushing for more technology and equipment to improve safety.

The NTSB and FAA have each also sought to try to reduce accidents. General aviation isn't as regulated as commercial airlines, NTSB spokesperson Peter Knudson said. And equipment, infrastructure and training between the two are starkly different.

"There's a certain level of risk in these kind of operations," Knudson said.

WSDOT is asking anyone with information about Collen's flight or who may have spotted anything in the search area to call the State Emergency Operations Center at 800-258-5990. The plane's tail number is N24289.

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Shea Johnson, Staff Writer, 'Wash. among leaders for single-engine plane accidents', *News Tribune, The* (online), 19 Mar 2023 1A <<https://infoweb-newsbank-com.ezproxy.kcls.org/apps/news/document-view?p=NewsBank&docref=news/1905EDC7D11F7028>>

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