

How Low-IFR Takeoffs Can Go Bad

That the zero-zero-takeoff can go wrong shouldn't be open for debate. If you're still in doubt, here are some NTSB reports for your consideration, which should at least serve as a reminder of the operation's risky nature.

CESSNA 414A, AUGUST 19, 2010, NEW BEDFORD, PENN.

Between one to two miles from the runway, the airplane collided with trees while in IMC. Damage to both wings' leading edges and leaking fuel was apparent. The pilot declared an emergency and was vectored for a nearby ILS approach. When he attempted to extend the landing gear, the nosegear would not lower. The pilot elected to land on the main gear. The pilot and passenger exited the airplane once it came to a stop. A witness at the departure airport stated ground visibility was poor when the airplane departed.

Probable Cause: "The pilot's failure to establish a proper climb gradient during a departure in instrument meteorological conditions, which resulted in a collision with trees."

PIPER PA-28R-T-201, JUNE 13, 2007, TINICUM, PENN.

The private pilot was attempting an early morning, short-field takeoff. During the takeoff roll, "mist blew into the departure end of the runway." The pilot continued the takeoff, and about 50 feet above the ground, the airplane impacted trees off the left side of the runway and flipped over. A fire department photograph, taken upon arrival at the airstrip, revealed the presence of fog about halfway down the runway. The airstrip was 2200 feet long and 100 feet wide, with trees on both sides.

Probable Cause: "The...pilot's failure to maintain runway alignment by instruments after encountering fog during the initial climb. A factor was the foggy weather conditions."

CESSNA 206H, DECEMBER 17, 2009, SANFORD, N.C.

According to a passenger, the airplane lifted off the runway, climbed to approximately 20 to 30 feet, and began a banking turn to the left. The passenger then heard bangs or thumping noises. Examination of the accident site revealed the main wreckage was located in a wooded area approximately 1200 feet left of the runway and approximately 4500 feet from its threshold. Wreckage debris and a swath of freshly broken trees extended 240 feet. Post-accident examination of components revealed no evidence of a mechanical malfunction was observed.

Probable Cause: "The pilot's loss of control of the airplane during takeoff initial climb due to spatial disorientation, which resulted in an inflight collision with trees and the ground. Factors were the dark night, fog, and low ceilings."

