



## News Release

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest  
Supervisor's Office  
1200 Franklin Way  
Sparks, NV 89431

**Contact:** Christie Kalkowski, 775-355-5311

**For Immediate Release on September 5, 2008 - Stop Date is September 30, 2008**

### Honoring Tanker 09 Crew

**Sparks, Nevada...**Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest Supervisor Ed Monnig confirmed early Tuesday morning that a P2V-7 airtanker, Tanker 09, crashed at approximately 6:09 p.m. on Monday, September 1, 2008, shortly after take-off from Stead Airport, 15 miles north of Reno in Washoe County, Nevada. "My heart goes out to the friends and families of those who were aboard the airtanker," said Monnig.

Three contract crew members aboard Tanker 09 died; the Washoe County Coroner released their names on the Wednesday afternoon, September 3. The three include pilot Calvin "Gene" Wahlstrom, 61, of Huntsville, Utah; co-pilot Greg "Gonzo" Gonsioroski, 41, of Baker, Montana; and, airplane mechanic Zach VanderGriend, 25, of Missoula, Montana. The tanker had completed a mission on a fire in the Sierra Nevada earlier on Monday, returned to Stead Airport, refueled, and reloaded with retardant.

"The men on board Tanker 09 were both brave and courageous," Monnig stated. "The Forest Service has the deepest gratitude for their selfless commitment to keeping others safe. These dedicated and skilled aerial firefighters worked in an environment where few boldly dare to tread. The devotion and pride that Gene, Greg, and Zach displayed consistently in their respective areas are a true testament to their honor. Our entire firefighting community across the country recognizes the profound loss to those who knew and cared for this talented Tanker 09 crew."

Greg Gonsioroski's funeral was held today at 11:00 a.m. at the Emanuel Evangelical Free Church, in Plevna, Montana. A memorial fund has been established for the Gonsioroski children at: c/o Wells Fargo Bank, P.O. Box 699, Baker, Montana, 59313.

For Gene Walstrom, visitation will be at Lyndquist, Layton, Sunday evening, September 7, 6:00-8:00 p.m., and Monday, September 8, at the Huntsville Church from 9:15-10:45 a.m. The funeral will follow at 11:00 a.m. at the 1<sup>st</sup> Ward Chapel. For Zach VanderGriend, services will be held on Tuesday, September 9, at Sonlight Community Church, 8800 Bender Road, Lynden, Washington, at 12:00 p.m.

Cards and letters may be sent to the families at: c/o Neptune Aviation Services Inc., 2 Corporate Way, Missoula, Montana, 59808. The Wildland Firefighter Foundation (WFFF) is also assisting surviving family members. Donations may be made to the WFFF at WF Foundation 2049 Airport Way, Boise, Idaho, 83705.

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Other helpful WFFF contact information includes their e-mail at [info@wffoundation.org](mailto:info@wffoundation.org), their phone number, 208-336-2996, and their fax number, 208-336-2995.

Tanker 09 was one of 19 heavy airtankers under contract by the U.S. Forest Service. (Heavy airtankers are capable of carrying over 2,000 gallons of retardant). The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is investigating this accident. The cause of the accident is unknown, and it could be six-to-nine months to complete its final probable cause report. There is no known link or common cause related to previous accidents.

The Forest Service conducts thorough inspections of all aircraft before each wildfire season to ensure each aircraft complies with Forest Service safety standards. The Forest Service completed engineering studies and modified airtankers to eliminate the metal fatigue related to the 2002 airtanker accidents. Media calls pertaining to the cause of the accident should be directed to the NTSB at 202-314-6100; media calls about events before the accident and about this release should contact Forest Public Affairs Officer Christie Kalkowski at 775-355-5311.

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