



U-B photo by Robert E. Clark

A City-County airport fireman hoses foam onto the runway following an emergency landing by a Mountain Air Aviation plane Thursday

Crippled plane makes safe landing

Walla Walla's City-County Airport emergency crew earned its pay Thursday when it was called into action twice.

The crew helped avert a potential disaster at midafternoon Thursday by spraying foam on a runway, allowing a Mountain Air Aviation plane with a malfunctioning landing gear to land safely. That incident was reported to the District 4 fire department, which aided the airport emergency crew, at 2:42 p.m.

Shortly after 5 p.m. Friday, the airport emergency crew was called into action when a Cascade Airways aircraft reported it had lost oil pressure. However, the Cascade malfunction was later attributed to a faulty switch that signaled low oil pressure, Cascade station manager Mike Hays said.

No one was injured in either incident.

The Mountain Air flight had only one passenger, a mechanic from Cascade Airways who was going to Spokane for a plane part. The Cascade flight was a regularly scheduled commercial flight. It was not known how many passengers were on that flight.

Mountain Air's emergency proved to be a

test for the emergency crew and the pilots of the craft.

Walla Walla pilots William Porter and Lamar Sieg were at the plane's helm during its emergency landing on an alternate runway at the Airport.

The plane, which had just taken off from Walla Walla for Spokane, suffered a malfunction in its nose gear immediately after it got in the air, said Dan Boylan, Mountain Air general manager.

"The nose gear hadn't retracted, it was just hanging there," Boylan said. "This is the first problem we have ever had since we have been a company (six years)."

The pilots, who had both been assigned to the

craft because of the cloudy weather conditions, passed by the tower to confirm their suspicions about the faulty landing gear, Boylan said.

After attempting to bring the gear down manually, he said, the pilots decided to bring the plane down on an unused runway.

The airport's emergency crew and the District 4 firefighters were called in as the plane circled the airfield.

The men behind the controls called for the runway to be foamed to aid the emergency landing, said Jack Preston, airport fire and security chief.

But Preston said the plane missed the foam. But he added the landing was a "very good one."

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— Dan Boylan, general manager

Boylan, who was at the landing strip when the plane came down, also praised the pilots' work.

"A lot of different things could happen," he said. "You are stretching your odds when you do something like that."

"I feel real pleased with the way they handled it."

When the pilots came down, Preston said, they kept the nose of the plane up until the last possible second, Boylan said.

The plane skidded on its nose for about 15 feet, he said. The damage to the aircraft, however, was very slight.

After the plane came to a stop, fuel began to leak from tanks. The airport's fire department and District 4 then again sprayed the runway with foam to neutralize the fuel.

Both fire crews again were called to action when the Cascade flight suffered its apparent engine malfunction. District 4 Assistant Chief Phil Toon said his crew turned back when the plane landed safely.

"There was no danger whatsoever," said Cascade's Hays.