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For Immediate Release

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Diane Drobka

928-348-4403

Crash Kills Pilot

At approximately 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday, March 16, 2004, a single-engine air tanker (SEAT) pilot was killed when the plane he was flying crashed during a training exercise. The crash occurred in a remote area about 17 miles east of Safford.

The pilot was participating in the BLM's National SEAT Pilot Academy, a series of six, three-day sessions hosted by the BLM's National Fire and Aviation Office. He worked for a private aviation contractor that can be utilized by federal and state agencies during the fire season. The victim's name is being withheld pending notification of next of kin.

The Department of the Interior's Aviation Management Directorate will participate in the crash investigation, which is being coordinated with the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Local Emergency Medical Services, the Graham County Sheriff's Office, and Safford Volunteer Fire Department are assisting at the scene.

Single-engine air tankers are crop-dusting planes that have been converted to drop water or retardant on wildfires. They play a critical role in fire suppression due to their maneuverability.