

The International Association of Wildland Fire (IAWF) has received notice of the following wildland firefighter fatality. Our condolences go out to the family and coworkers.

**Name: Colonel Stergios Kotoulas**

Rank: Pilot

Age: 55

Gender: Male

Status: Wildland Volunteer, from the Greek Air Force

Years of Service: "4025 hours flying experience on a variety of aircraft" including 524's and PZL's.

Date of Incident: 08/27/2009

Time of Incident: approximately 12:45 (Greek time)

Date of Death: 08/27/2009

**Incident Description:** The pilot, Colonel Stergios Kotoulas, died while operating a 1983 Polish made PZL (M-18 Dromader, #1122) which crashed nine minutes after takeoff from the airport to fight a forest fire on the island of Kefalonia near the village of Katelios. He was the only person onboard. Witnesses reportedly saw the plane drop water on the fire then hit a power line while flying 30 feet off of the ground. Differing version have the PLZ crashing in the nearby Ionian Sea or next to a hotel in the village. The cause of the crash will be investigated by the Greek Air Force.

Greece purchased 30 PZL aircraft in the 1983-1984 time period for agricultural spraying and they were later converted for firefighting purposes. Reportedly 12 of these have crashed in the intervening years killing six pilots.

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**Other 2009 Wildland Fire Fatalities reported outside the US to Date:**

**Chile (13) – 15 February 2009**, 1 helicopter pilot (Eduardo Canala Pecchenino) and 12 firefighters, all males, ages 18 to 25, when the ship crashed into a rugged, fog shrouded hillside near Chanco, in Maule province, approximately 165 miles (270 kilometers) south

of Santiago. The helicopter had just retrieved the firefighters from their day's work on the forest fire which was being controlled at the time of the crash (5 PM local time, 2000 GMT). The firefighters worked for Celulosa Arauco y Constitucion, a Chilean timber and pulp company known as CELCO. The fire was burning on property of another timber company, Compania Astilladora de Concepcion, or COMACO, but CELCO had mobilized their firefighters to keep the fire from spreading. The helicopter was owned by Flight Service, a Maule based company. No cause of the crash has been given.

**Australia (1) – 17 February 2009**, 1 ACT Fire Brigade Senior Firefighter from Banks near Canberra, Firefighter David Balfour, male, age 47, 12 years of experience, incident occurred near Cambarville in Victoria. He was attempting to connect a hose at the rear of the engine when a burnt-out tree fell striking him.

**New Zealand (1) – 07 April 2009**, 1 volunteer fire service firefighter from Willowby, south of Ashburton, Firefighter Barry Keen, male, age 52, 35 years of experience by a falling tree branch. They had been called to extinguish a single burning tree from a previous stubble field burn at around 0430 Hours. The firefighter's had just got out of the fire apparatus and apparently Firefighter Keen walked around the front of the truck and at that stage a branch fell down and struck him on the head. Firefighter Keen was initially treated at the scene, but died within half an hour of the accident, 04/07/2009.

**Turkey (2) – 18 June 2009**, a retired Turkish Pilot and Squadron Leader (Commander Tanju Tezgel) and a Turkish Forest Staff member (Ali Ekin) aboard a Ukrainian firefighting helicopter died after it crashed into a reservoir in southwestern Turkey. The helicopter reportedly had taken on water to fight a forest fire, crashed into the Geyik Dam in the Milas region, and then sank. Actual cause of the crash is unknown at this time. The body of Commander Tezgel was recovered the morning of Friday, 19 June by divers from a Turkish rescue team but attempts were still being made to recover the forest staff member. Three Ukrainian pilots or technicians, depending on the report, aboard the same helicopter swam to shore with assistance from nearby citizens.

**Spain (4) – 21 July 2009**, four GRAF wildland firefighters died and two others were rushed to hospitals with life-threatening burns from an incident in northeastern Spain Tuesday 21 July 2009. The firefighters were reportedly trapped during a change in wind direction which blocked their escape route on an 800 hectare (1975 acres) forest fire in the Els Port National Park near Tarragona in Catalonia. The Horta de Sant Joan fire started on Tuesday 21 July.

**Spain (1) – 23 July 2009**, one firefighter died when the fire truck he was driving crashed in northeastern Spain.

**Spain (1) – 24 July 2009**, one of the injured GRAF wildland firefighters from the incident on 21 July died in the hospital from his burns.

**Canada (1) – 14 August 2009**, 1 helicopter pilot, Robert Christopher Woodhead, male, age 53, died while operating a Bell 212 with a line and bucket while working the nearly 1300 hectare Intipan fire which is believed to have been caused by a lightning strike.

The helicopter crashed into the swift current of the Thompson-Fraser River between Lytton and Lillooet, British Columbia, about 260 kilometers northeast of Vancouver. The reason for the crash is unknown at this time and is being investigated. The pilot was reportedly seen swimming in the water immediately after the helicopter crashed by another helicopter pilot who tried to rescue Woodhead by lowering his own bucket. He was later discovered downstream.

If you have information on additional 2009 wildland firefighter fatalities outside the US please pass that information along to [wildfire@iawfonline.org](mailto:wildfire@iawfonline.org) .