

Planes, Trains, and Tanker Trucks

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Here's a summary of transportation accidents in and around Raleigh. The selection criteria is that the Raleigh Fire Department responded. Included are a few plane crashes in the 1940s with no fire response. Excluded are a number of plane crashes at and around the airport in the 1950s and 1960s that the Raleigh Emergency Rescue Squad responded to. See this [airport fire department timeline](#) for information on those crashes. For roadway includes, only tanker fires are included here. Don't have good historical records on transfer truck fires, or major motor vehicle accidents. See my [Raleigh Fire Department timelines](#) for information. Readers are welcome to add, edit, or reminisce.

Aircraft Accidents

Jan. 11, 1929 - Light plane crashes at Poindexter Field, airstrip located outside city limits. Pilot killed. Fire department responds. First fatal air crash in city.

Feb. 12, 1940 - Light plane crashes on Highway 15-A, south of Raleigh Municipal Airport. Two killed aboard. The next day, the plane bursts into flames while being towed from site. Fire response not known.

Aug. 9, 1942 - Twin-engine bomber crashes into woods outside Raleigh Municipal Airport. Three crew members killed, five injured. Plane strikes pine trees at end of runway, and remains airborne for about three-quarters of a mile. Lands in middle of small swamp. Rescuers include golfers playing on nearby course. No bombs aboard, but 50 caliber ammo is denotating as rescuerers arrive. No fire response.

Nov. 10, 1942 - A-24 Douglas dive bomber crashes into Army tent encampment at Raleigh Municipal Airport. Pilot killed, radio operator thrown from plane but walks away, two on ground injured. Plane slices off several pine tree tops, and bursts into flames after striking recreation tent and mess tent. No fire response.

Oct. 19, 1943 - Navy pursuit plane crashes into plowed field outside Raleigh Municipal Airport. Pilot slightly injured. Plane is demolished. Was flying in formation at time of accident.

Oct. 29, 1943 - Pair of Army pursuit planes crash on Garner Highway about three miles south of Raleigh. Both pilots killed. Was flying in formation at time of accident. Raleigh sends one truck.

May 9, 1944 - B-17 bomber crashes into wooded area in Garner. Two crew members killed. Raleigh sends two trucks and 12 men to scene. Fire Chief W. R. Butts is one of the first officials to arrive on scene. Burning wreckage is scattered over area 600 yards long and 100 yards wide. Bombs and bullets explode long after crash. Spectators drawn to the scene are told to keep back for fear of further explosions.

Jan. 15, 1947 - Light plane crashes into woods five miles west of Wake Forest. Three people aboard killed. One passenger rescued but later dies at scene while badly burned bodies are being recovered. Raleigh also responds.

Jun. 1, 1947 - Light plane crashes at air show at O'Neal Flying Service Field, two miles north of Raleigh. Two killed aboard. Plane is one of three demonstrating precision spins at 2,000 feet. Wreckage is found half-mile from end of runway. No fire response.

Jun. 27, 1947 - Light plane loses wheel taking off at Raleigh Municipal Airport. Safely lands after arrival of Raleigh auxiliary fire unit and ambulance.

Aug. 1, 1964 - Light plane crashes at Raleigh Municipal Airport. Pilot killed, child passenger survives. Recently purchased plane begins losing power about 100 feet above runway after taking off. Pilot attempts to turn around and craft nose-dives to earth.

Jun. 19, 1977 - Light plane crashes on Ridge Road after striking steeple of church. No fire at either church or crash site. Neighbors plug the leaking fuel with sticks and being searching for pilot. His body is thrown clear of crash. Twisted piece of metal is found on church roof, while pieces of aircraft are scattered through yard of a residence one block from church.

Feb. 18, 1992 - Light plane crashes in Umstead Park about a half-mile behind car dealership on Glenwood Avenue. Both occupants killed, including a Wake County Commissioner. Raleigh responds with others.

Mar. 1, 1992 - Runaway hot-air balloon crashes at intersection of Millbrook and Green roads. Neither pilot nor passenger injured while

attempting to launch from soccer field off Millbrook Road. Pilot receives citation for taking off inside city limits without permit.

Dec. 12, 2001 - Light plane crashes into house on Stone Horse Court. Three aboard killed. Resident escapes. Raleigh and county units respond.

Mar. 26, 2004 - Navy fighter jet explodes on take-off at RDU. Pilot safely ejects. Burning craft continues rolling and comes to rest about 250 feet from Terminal A. Raleigh responds along with CFR and county units. Jet is one of two refueling at airport.

Sep. 21, 2007 - Light plane strikes restaurant on Highway 70 in Clayton. Pilot killed. Minor injuries on ground. Raleigh responds as part of NC USAR Task Force 8.

Airport Incidents

Aug. 29, 1996 - Storage building and 600 gallons of oil burn at Raleigh Municipal Airport. Raleigh responds. Apparatus from Raleigh-Durham airport also requested, but returned to service.

Oct. 31, 1996 - Hangar at RDU burns after light plane catches fire during de-fueling. Two workers transported with smoke inhalation. Four or five planes destroyed. Raleigh responds with CFR and units from Durham and Wake county.

Railroad Accidents

Jan. 17, 1907 - Passenger train derailed and burns two miles north of Raleigh. Capital Hose Company responds, but cannot do anything as fire has made such headway.

Apr. 28, 1933 - Freight train derailed near center of town in Morrisville. No crew members are injured, but search is made for missing hobo. Both Raleigh and Durham send units.

Jul. 12, 1943 - Freight train derailed at Boylan Heights viaduct. Two crew members killed, three injured. Fire department stays on scene until following morning.

Dec. 28, 1946 - Passenger train and freight train collide in Auburn. Sixteen injured, and seven hospitalized. Accident occurs when both trains are slowing to a stop at the station. Raleigh responds with unit(s). Firefighters form a cordon around scene due to gasoline that has filled gullies on both sides of tracks. Spectators subsequently bring containers to the scene, and take gasoline home using tubs and buckets.

May 6, 1953 - Passenger train collides with construction equipment at New Hill and catches fire. Burning engine continues to Apex, where firefighters extinguish the blaze. Engine continues to Raleigh, where crews extinguish small amount of fire still burning under one of the engines.

Apr. 1, 1958 - Passenger train collides with gasoline tanker at S. Blount Street crossing. See: Tanker Fires.

Apr. 23, 1966 - Eight freight cars derail and burn just south of Wake Forest. Raleigh responds along with county units. High-expansion foam unit also dispatched, but is ineffective. As the story goes, the freight cars included frozen food, and many firefighters took home frozen meat from the scene.

Nov. 6, 1979 - Southern Railway freight train derailed downtown. Nine cars leave tracks near Jones Street crossing. Building on Glenwood Avenue struck. No injuries, even for a worker in the building on Glenwood who is briefly buried. Firefighters lay hose as precaution against gas leak from propane tank used to thaw track switch in winter.

Railroad Incidents

Aug. 22, 1886 - Two freight cars burn near the North Carolina Car Company shops.

Jul. 22, 1897 - Switching engine at Southern Railway yard burns.

Jan. 6, 1942 - Locomotive cab burns, when sparks from the firebox ignite the wooden interior.

Jun. 12, 1947 - Box car and pulp wood truck burn in Auburn. Raleigh responds with unit(s).

May 15, 1956 - Fire discovered in freight car in Apex. When train arrives in Raleigh, it's switched to a side track with waiting firefighters.

Oct. 8-11, 1982 - Gunman holds woman and two children hostage on passenger train at Seaboard Station. Fire and EMS stand by. Stand off starts at 7:00 p.m. on Friday after gunshots heard. Male surrenders at 5:45 a.m. on Monday. Bodies of woman and child discovered on board.

Four year-old child survives.

Railroad Facility Incidents

Feb. 25, 1848 - Raleigh & Gaston Railroad engine house burns. Four locomotives damaged.

Nov. 30, 1886 - Cotton platform and 1,000 bales of cotton burn. Fire is fought by both Raleigh fire companies and Raleigh & Gaston Railroad shop employees. Goldsboro FD contacted and requested to stand by. Some cotton still burning after two weeks.

Mar. 12, 1906 - Seaboard Air Line Railroad cotton warehouse burns. Fire companies respond as far as possible, but cannot reach building due to distance from city. Several firefighters continue on foot and assist.

Dec. 28, 1890 - Raleigh & Gaston Railroad roundhouse on Johnson Street burns. Building is lost due to difficult water supply. With only one working hydrant found, supply lines from steamer are laid to nearest water cistern. Damage includes 17 locomotives.

Apr. 22, 1896 - Seaboard Air Line Railway shops on Johnson Street burn. Raleigh fire companies arrive within three minutes, but cannot save building.

Dec. 20, 1913 - Norfolk-Southern Railroad repair shops at Glenwood Yards burn. Facility is closed at time of fire. No water is available, and Raleigh units travel no further north than Pilot Mills.

Jan. 26, 1914 - Seaboard Air Line Railway coal chute burns. Fire takes nine hours to extinguish.

Aug. 25, 1920 - Seaboard Air Line Railway roundhouse on Johnson Street burns. Fire controlled by company fire brigade, prior to arrival of Raleigh units.

Jun. 15, 1932 - Seaboard Air Line Railway roundhouse on Johnson Street burns. Eight of 22 locomotives damaged. Water pumped from three and four blocks away. Hundreds of spectators attracted to night scene.

Dec. 8, 1936 - Seaboard Air Line Railway shop destroyed by fire. The abandoned roundhouse-turned-shop is reported ablaze at 4:35 a.m.

May 18, 1939 - Norfolk-Southern Railroad maintenance shop at Glenwood Yards destroyed by fire. Tall columns of smoke attract hundreds of residents. Three locomotives are damaged.

Nov. 29, 1939 - Seaboard Air Line Railway commissary building on W. Johnson Street destroyed by fire. Crews keep flames from spreading to roundhouse and other buildings.

May 9, 1941 - Norfolk-Southern Railway coal chute at Glenwood Yards burns. Firefighters save 160 tons of the 200 ton load. Dynamite is initially considered as a means to extinguish.

Tanker Truck Fires

Jun. 10, 1947 - Gasoline tanker burns on Durham Highway about 10 miles from Raleigh. Driver leaps from cab, after seeing fire. Truck crashes into embankment and continues to burn from 3:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. Raleigh fire unit arrives five hours later and extinguishes blaze.

Apr. 1, 1958 - Gasoline tanker struck by passenger train at S. Blount Street crossing. Driver and child passenger killed. Train engineer later charged with manslaughter for exceeded city ordinance requiring trains to travel 15 mph or slower.

Aug. 6, 1977 - Gasoline tanker overturns and burns on Beltline at New Bern Avenue. Raleigh sends one unit to assist New Hope and Knightdale.

Dec. 18, 1998 - Gasoline tanker explodes and burns on Beltline near Capital Boulevard. Driver killed, after striking abandoned vehicle on shoulder. Fires burn at crash site, above embankment, and at bottom of storm-drain slope. Airport unit summoned, in addition to county tankers. Fire burns itself out.

Aug. 26, 2008 - Gasoline tanker overturns and burns on Beltline near Rock Quarry Road. Driver ejected, pulled to safety by bystanders. Raleigh and Garner respond. County tankers summoned, fire burns itself out.

And quickly updated with a couple corrections, and some added details here and there.

Legeros - 10/17/09 - 08:37

I don't know when it was, but i always here stories about the hot air balloon striking the tv tower in garner

doppler ([Email](#)) - 10/19/09 - 16:52

June 11, 1989, balloon crashes after colliding with TV tower support cables (in Garner). Balloon Works Firefly 8B takes off from soccer field with two passengers and remains at low altitude. The reported wind is initially from the northeast. At 500 feet, the reported wind is from the northwest. At 1000 and 2000 feet, the reported wind shifts back to the east. Balloon is seen crossing a highway at a southwest heading about one mile from a 2000 foot tall television tower. One witness reports burner is open just before impact with supporting cables. Balloon's envelope then collapses and streamers and balloon descends rapidly to the ground. Examination of envelope shows same had been torn by tower support cables.

That's from the NTSB report. Readers can add additional details.

Legeros - 10/19/09 - 17:18

And there are numerous other incidents that have occurred in the county, and without a Raleigh response.

Passenger train derails after striking bakery struck in Wake Forest, 1942.

Freight train derails in Wake Forest, 1958.

Freight train derails and burns in Chatham County, 1959.

Freight train derails and burns outside Knightdale, 1963.

Passenger train derails behind Athey plant in Wake Forest, 1974.

Gasoline tanker overturns outside Garner, 1985.

News helicopter crash in Fuquay, 1993.

Several light plane crashes in Apex, Knightdale, etc.

And so on...

Legeros - 10/19/09 - 17:31

American Eagle Flight 3379 crash in Morrisville on December 12, 1994. 15 fatalities and 5 survivors.

Olson - 10/20/09 - 08:59

Olson, I was just going to ask about that. I rember guys talking about the crash at YRAC when I was younger.

Kermit - 10/20/09 - 18:50

I was the only witness to the 6/11/89 hot air ballon crash in Garner. I lived just past the TV towers, on Guy Road. The air was unusually dry that morning, and the wind was generally out of the north – both were unusual for June. I was on my roof early that morning and was painting the trim around my chimney when I saw the balloon aloft maybe 1500 to 1600 feet above the ground. Balloons were common in the area as were biplanes. But, it was odd to see a balloon so close to the towers. I recognized the craft as Dan Johnson's balloon. While painting I glanced at the balloon several times, and realized that something was wrong – the pilot was getting closer and closer to the towers, and he was not gaining altitude.

I saw the balloon hit the guy wire on the side of the tower at about 1300 or 1400 feet. Within seconds the entire balloon collapsed into a vertical streamer, and the entire craft plummeted to the ground. I came down the ladder, and ran inside my house, grabbed my keys, and took off in my truck. I was a former police officer, and stopped at a neighbor's house as he was a Trooper and a pilot, and I needed his radio (remember – we had no cell phones back then). Unable to wake him, I took off towards the tower access road. As I got to the gate an off-duty paramedic pulled up. He'd seen the balloon a few moments earlier, and had heard the propane burner. He then looked back up, did not see the balloon, and put two and two together. We entered the TV tower site, and found the downed balloon. The pilot and passengers were deceased, and one of the propane tanks was leaking.

We left the site, and I went to the convenience store on US70 at Guy Road to use a phone. While there I found two Marines heading to reserve duty in Raleigh. I told them to take up a guard post at the tower road, and to not let anyone down the road unless they had a red or blue light. Soon the area was file with emergency personnel. Then, a deputy approached me, and asked me if I could take care of the pilot's wife; she had been trying to call him on the radio, knew he was in the area, but didn't know exactly where he was. I only shared with her that he was on

the ground, had a leaking tank, and we needed one of his balloon buddies to come out and help. I then called the number she gave me, spoke to his friend, and got the friend to rush to the crash site to help break the news to her, and to take care of her.

Late that day the FAA and the FCC came to my house, and we all returned to the tower/crash site together. I helped them identify exactly where the balloon hit the guy cable.

That was a long day, and I'll remember it forever. Maybe a year later I was at Wake Med in the ER, and a paramedic came up to me. He remembered me from the crash – he was the one who had last seen the balloon trying to gain altitude. We talked about the crash, and the memories of what we saw.

Several years later I was speaking with a photographer from CCBI. He told me that they had processed the film on the female passenger's camera, and the last frame was the tower up close. He also told me that the altimeter was locked at 1300-something feet.

Daren ([Email](#)) - 03/19/12 - 15:26

Name: (real name
preferred)

E-mail: (optional)

Web Site: (optional)

Remember personal info?

Yes

No

Comment:

/ [Textile](#)

Comment moderation is enabled on this site. This means that your comment will not be visible on this site until it has been approved by an editor.

To prevent spam we require you to answer this silly question

What are the FIRST TWO LETTERS of the word 'fire'?

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Notify: Yes, send me email when someone replies.

Hide email: Yes, hide my email address.

Small print: All html tags except and <i> will be removed from your comment. You can make links by just typing the url or mail-address.