5 BODIES FOUND IN PLANE WRECKAGE IN CALIFORNIA ORCHARD

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Five people have been found dead in the widely spread wreckage of a small plane that crashed into an almond orchard in California near Bakersfield, authorities said.

The plane became the subject of a search after disappearing from radar, Kern County sheriff's Sgt. Mark King said, and federal authorities are investigating the cause. He expected the names of the victims to be released Monday.

Air traffic controllers lost contact with the single-engine Piper PA32 around 4 p.m. Saturday as it headed from Reid-Hillview Airport in San Jose to Henderson Executive Airport in a Las Vegas suburb, Federal Aviation Administration spokesman Ian Gregor said.

The plane sent a mayday call before disappearing. Searchers spotted the wreckage southwest of Bakersfield about three hours after receiving an alert from the FAA about a missing plane that was last detected an estimated 10 miles south of the city, the Kern County sheriff's office said.

A meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Hanford said it was rainy and cloudy in the area south of Bakersfield around the time the plane dropped off radar.

A National Transportation Safety Board investigator also was on site Sunday, Gregor said.

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FAA records list an address for an owner of the plane. A woman who answered a number listed for that address would only say that her husband used to be part owner of the plane but sold his share.

The crash was only about 30 miles from the site of a medical helicopter crash that killed four people in heavy rain and fog 10 days earlier.

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