

[Home](#) > [News](#) > [MarketWatch](#) > D.C. plane collision underscores rarity of fatal aviation crashes in the U.S.

D.C. plane collision underscores rarity of fatal aviation crashes in the U.S.



Provided by Dow Jones • Jan 30, 2025 4:25pm

By Claudia Assis

'One is too many': The global accident rate in 2023 was one for every 1.26 million flights, a record year for safety

The tragic collision involving an American Airlines (AAL) regional jet and a military helicopter late Wednesday underscores how fatal crashes of passenger planes in the U.S. are rare, and "near misses" are also becoming rarer.

"We have had a relatively safe period for quite a while," said Ernest Arvai, president of aviation consultant AirInsight Group. Deadly crashes such as Wednesday's are thankfully rare events, especially when considering the number of flights crisscrossing America's skies, he said.

"But perfect is always the goal of aviation, and even one is too many," Arvai said.

The Wednesday collision killed 67 people.

An investigation into the causes of the collision will take at least six months to conclude, and will likely center around whether the military helicopter might have been in the wrong place at the wrong time, Arvai said.

President Donald Trump on Thursday morning said the Federal Aviation Administration, the National Transportation Safety Board and the U.S. military will be "carrying out a systematic and comprehensive investigation," and he announced that he's naming an

acting commissioner for the FAA, Christopher Rocheleau, a 22-year veteran of the agency.

"We do not know what led to this crash, but we have some very strong opinions and ideas," Trump also said as he addressed reporters in the White House briefing room.

The president then said he thinks diversity hiring at the FAA could have played a role in the collision, and he blamed "a pilot problem from the standpoint of the helicopter," adding that it was "a very clear night."

Nearly two years ago, the U.S. grappled with a shortage of air-traffic controllers and news of close calls involving commercial aircraft that resulted in Capitol Hill hearings and airline schedule-cuts at the peak of summer travel.

According to the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, a union, there were 10,733 certified professional controllers as of late 2024 working the National Airspace System, a network of controlled and uncontrolled airspace and facilities managed by the FAA.

The union's target is to have 14,335 certified controllers "to fully staff the NAS," a spokesperson said.

The FAA adjusted in 2023 its hiring goal for each of fiscal years 2024 through 2026 to 1,800 new hires, which the union called at the time "a positive development."

The NAS is comprised of more than 45,000 daily flights and 2.9 million airline passengers traveling across the more than 29 million square miles, according to the FAA.

While the FAA has hired more controllers as part of its plan to address shortages, often there are lags between hiring and performing duties, and between starting on the job and performing duties at the nation's busiest airports.

It takes about three years to train a new employee, and the dropout rate is about 50%, "which is another big problem," Arvai said.

"You've got to be on 100% of the time, and things change very quickly," he said. "It can be overwhelming at times."

Arvai, a seasoned aviation professional, recalled being a part of an air-traffic control simulation and experiencing that overwhelmingness even as a pro. "If things go wrong they can cascade and escalate very quickly."

New controllers usually start out at smaller cities, meaning it can take a while to get more professionals to the busiest corridors, and to work unsupervised.

Before Wednesday's collision, there had not been a fatal incident involving a U.S. commercial passenger plane in 14 years. In 2009, a propeller plane operating as a Continental regional flight headed to Buffalo, N.Y., stalled near its destination and crashed into a house, killing the two pilots, two flight attendants, 45 passengers aboard and one person on the ground.

According to the most recent report on aviation trends by the International Air Transport Association, a trade group encompassing major carriers across the globe, 2023 was "a record year for aviation safety."

The global accident rate in 2023 was one for every 1.26 million flights, compared to one accident every 770,000 flights in 2022 and a five-year average of one accident every 880,00 flights.

Victor Reklaitis in Washington, D.C., contributed.

-Claudia Assis

This content was created by MarketWatch, which is operated by Dow Jones & Co. MarketWatch is published independently from Dow Jones Newswires and The Wall Street Journal.

(END) Dow Jones Newswires

01-30-25 1625ET

Copyright (c) 2025 Dow Jones & Company, Inc.

Turn our insights into action with a subscription to Morningstar Investor. Start a free trial.

Get 7 Days Free

More in Markets

[View All >](#)

Active ETFs Dominate the US Fund Landscape in 2024

Plus, seven other charts of key findings from the fourth quarter.

Andrew Daniels • Jan 30, 2025



Going Into Earnings, Is Eli Lilly Stock a Buy, a Sell, or Fairly Valued?

With new drug development, a significant increase in sales, and high potential with Mounjaro and Zepbound, here's what we think of Eli Lilly's stock

Karen Andersen, CFA • Jan 30, 2025



10 Stock and Bond Market Insights That Are Hardly 'Dull'

Indexes can highlight risks and uncover opportunities for investors.

Dan Lefkovitz • Jan 28, 2025



More in Stocks

[View All >](#)

Utility Stocks 2025 Outlook: Back to Normal?

After the big rally in utilities, the bullish themes are growing tired.

Andrew Bischof, CFA and Travis Miller • Jan 29, 2025



8 Stock Picks in the Apparel Industry

The industry has struggled to find any consistency, but there are attractive long-term opportunities.

David Swartz • Jan 30, 2025



24 Newly Overvalued Stocks

Visa and Abbott are among the stocks that are now expensive.

Bella Albrecht • Jan 27, 2025



United States

© Copyright 2025 Morningstar, Inc. All rights reserved. Dow Jones Industrial Average, S&P 500, Nasdaq, and Morningstar Index (Market Barometer) quotes are real-time.