

Crashed Ukrainian Plane Hit Weather Station

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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KIEV — A plane that crashed at a Ukrainian airport, killing five people, hit the airport's weather station while landing in thick fog, officials said.

The Soviet-built An-24 twin-engine turboprop carrying football fans headed for a match against a German team crashed while trying to land at the Donetsk airport on Wednesday evening. Of the 44 passengers and eight crew on board, five were killed and nine injured.

Donetsk Prosecutor Volodymyr Vyshinsky on Thursday said the plane, which was flying from the Black Sea port of Odessa, grazed the weather station with its left wing as it was approaching the landing strip, then hit the ground with its right wing and broke into two pieces.

Airport weather stations are slim, unmanned towers that hold the sensors and measuring equipment that record weather data. They are separate from the airport's control tower.

Investigators are considering pilot error, faulty ground support equipment and poor weather conditions as possible causes. Witnesses said the plane quickly caught fire. Passengers escaped from the burning aircraft through a hole in the fuselage left by the crash.

The plane's pilot, Serhiy Meloshenko, blamed bad weather for the accident. "There was heavy fog," he told Channel 5 from a hospital bed. "The landing strip was poorly visible. Or to be more precise, it was not visible at all."

Yuri Molod, head of South Airlines, which operated the flight, told 1+1 television that the plane was in good condition, and he blamed the pilot for the crash-landing. Molod said the pilot should not have landed in the fog and should have diverted to another airport.

South Airlines is a small company that operates mainly domestic flights out of the Black Sea port of Odessa. Its planes were ordered grounded pending an investigation into the crash.

The An-24, which first entered service in 1959, is a medium-range plane that has remained a mainstay of carriers across the former Soviet Union even though production ended in 1978. It wasn't clear when the crashed plane had been built.

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