

Spaceship's descent device deployed prematurely

November 3 2014, by Brian Melley



Law enforcement officers take a closer look at the wreckage near the site where a Virgin Galactic space tourism rocket, SpaceShipTwo, exploded and crashed in Mojave, Calif. Saturday, Nov 1, 2014. The explosion killed a pilot aboard and seriously injured another while scattering wreckage in Southern California's Mojave Desert, witnesses and officials said. (AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu)

Investigators say Virgin Galactic's experimental spaceship broke apart in flight over California's Mojave Desert after a device to slow the craft's descent prematurely deployed.

National Transportation Safety Board acting chairman Christopher Hart

said Sunday that while no cause for Friday's crash has been determined, investigators found the "feathering" system was activated before the craft reached the appropriate speed.

The system requires a two-step process to deploy. The co-pilot unlocked the system but Hart said the second step occurred "without being commanded."

Hart said the SpaceShipTwo's fuel tanks and engines showed no signs of being compromised.

The co-pilot was killed. The pilot parachuted to the ground and is hospitalized.



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Law enforcement officers keep watch on the wreckage near the site where a Virgin Galactic space tourism rocket, SpaceShipTwo, exploded and crashed in Mojave, Calif. Saturday, Nov 1, 2014. The explosion killed a pilot aboard and seriously injured another while scattering wreckage in Southern California's Mojave Desert, witnesses and officials said. (AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu)



A journalist makes a video of the wreckage near the site where a Virgin Galactic space tourism rocket, SpaceShipTwo, exploded and crashed in Mojave, Calif. Saturday, Nov 1, 2014. The explosion killed a pilot aboard and seriously injured another while scattering wreckage in Southern California's Mojave Desert, witnesses and officials said. (AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu)



A tank, part of wreckage lies near the site where a Virgin Galactic space tourism rocket, SpaceShipTwo, exploded and crashed in Mojave, Calif. Saturday, Nov 1, 2014. The explosion killed a pilot aboard and seriously injured another while scattering wreckage in Southern California's Mojave Desert, witnesses and officials said. (AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu)



In this video grabbed image, billionaire Virgin Galactic founder Richard Branson, at podium, pauses during a news conference before he saluted the bravery of test pilots, and vowed to find out what caused the crash of his prototype space tourism rocket that killed one crew member and injured another in Mojave, Calif., Saturday, Nov. 1, 2014. Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo blew apart about 20 miles (32 kilometers) from the Mojave airfield after being released from a carrier aircraft Friday. (AP Photo/Scott Fain)



In this undated photo released Saturday, Nov. 1, 2014, by Scaled Composites, shows Michael Alsbury, who was killed while co-piloting the test flight of Virgin Galactic SpaceShipTwo on Friday, Oct. 31, 2014. The surviving pilot was identified as Peter Siebold, 43. Siebold was to undergo surgery, on Saturday, Nov. 1, 2014, but there were no other details on his condition, Kern County Sheriff Donny Youngblood said. Siebold also is a veteran of Scaled's spaceship test program. (AP Photo/Scaled Composites)

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