



180TH FIGHTER WING, TOLEDO, OH OHIO AIR NATIONAL GUARD

NEWS ADVISORY IMMEDIATE RELEASE



2660 SOUTH EBER ROAD, SWANTON, OH 43558-8752

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FOLLOW-UP: 180FW Fuel Tank Emergency

(Swanton, Ohio) – At approximately 1:30 p.m., July 31, 2024, an F-16 fighter jet, assigned to the Ohio National Guard's 180th Fighter Wing, suffered an in-flight emergency due to an external fuel tank malfunction.

As a result of the malfunction, one of the external fuel tanks began to break apart during flight, scattering debris across a shopping center parking lot in Tawas, Mich., causing damage to property and vehicles in the area.

Aircrew immediately diverted the flight path away from populated areas and successfully jettisoned the remainder of the damaged fuel tank along with the second, in tact fuel tank, into Tawas Bay, in an effort to prevent further property damage or injury/loss of life of area residents.

The aircraft landed safely at the 180FW at 2:10 p.m. and there were no injuries to the aircrew, maintenance personnel or Tawas-area residents.

Immediately following the incident, a team from the Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center, including Fire & Emergency Services, Civil Engineers and Bioenvironmental Airmen, deployed to the shopping center to assist Tawas-area law enforcement and emergency crews in securing the site, evaluating damage, and minimize the impact of the fuel spill.

A team assigned to the U.S. Coast Guard's Tawas Station, recovered remaining debris from the damaged fuel tank and secured the in tact tank located in Tawas Bay.

Clean-up, containment and remediation efforts began around 11:00 p.m. July 31, with environmental remediation specialists and Tawas-area fire and HAZMAT teams reinforcing berms around storm water drains, installing drain covers and placing absorbent materials over affected areas. Clean-up crews also deployed equipment to prevent additional fuel from entering the stormwater drains and to contain the fuel that had collected in the nearby retention pond.



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The 180FW is working to secure a long-term remediation and restoration contract to continue non-emergency environmental clean-up efforts.

While clean-up efforts will remain on-going for several weeks, all debris have been removed from the shopping center and businesses were able to open this morning, Aug. 1.

Residents and area businesses that suffered building and/or property damage can file an official claim through the 88th Air Base Wing, at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio. Information and the forms needed to begin a claim can be located on the home page of the 180FW public website: www.180fw.ang.af.mil or those wishing to file a claim can call the 88th ABW at (937) 257-6142.

Special thanks to all agencies that responded rapidly to assist, including the Oscoda County Sheriff's Office, Michigan State Police, East Tawas Fire Department, Tawas City Fire Department, Alpena CRTC and the U.S. Coast Guard's Tawas Station

The 180FW appreciates the continued support from the citizens of Michigan as we continue to train in support of our missions.

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NOTE: Please see next page for answers to some of the most frequently asked questions following the incident.

For current photos and videos of the 180FW, visit:
<https://www.dvidshub.net/unit/180FWONG>



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FAQs

1. Q: Why was part of the fuel tank dropped in a populated area?

A: No pilot will ever intentionally jettison anything over a populated area. During some in-flight emergencies it is required to reduce the gross weight of the aircraft for the pilot to have the best opportunity to safely recover the aircraft. With time and conditions permitting, the pilot will always aim for an unpopulated area prior to releasing anything from the aircraft, like a lake, farm field, etc. Pilots will always do everything, they can to prevent loss of life, as well as, any damage to people, property and to minimize any damage to the local environment. The pieces that landed in the populated area were caused by the fuel tank breaking apart in-flight for an unknown reason. This was simply an unfortunate accident that happened over a populated area at the time of the failure. After the tank failed and even though portions of the tank fell to the ground, there were still some parts that remained attached to the aircraft. This led the aircraft to potentially be out of balance with an unknown center of gravity which leads to uncertain flight characteristics that could elevate the risk during landing. Also, there is the potential for more pieces to depart the failed tank while flying to an airfield for landing. Due to these reasons, the pilot jettisoned the remaining pieces/tank over Lake Huron to prevent any additional risks to people and property in the vicinity of the mishap or enroute to the landing airfield.

2. Q: What is protocol for pilots in emergencies like this?

A: The basic pilot protocols are to always handle the emergency in the safest way possible with minimal damage to the crew, the aircraft, people, and property. If the emergency can be mitigated the pilots will then make the determination as to where to land in the safest manner. If the emergency cannot be mitigated, the pilot will attempt to land at the nearest suitable airport or landing surface. If the pilot cannot make it to an airport or suitable landing surface, the pilot will attempt to land in an unpopulated area

3. Q: Who responded to the initial incident?

A: The East Tawas Fire Department, the Tawas City Fire Department the Alpena Combat Readiness Training Center Fire and Emergency Services departments, the Oscoda County Sheriff's Department, Michigan State Police and the U.S. Coast Guard responded to assist. The 180FW would like to extend our appreciation and thanks to all the people and organizations that responded to the incident that occurred.

4. Q: What are the clean-up efforts being made?

A: Environmental remediation specialists and Tawas-area fire and HAZMAT teams began reinforcing berms around storm drains, instilling drain covers and placing absorbent materials on all affected areas. Clean-up crews also deployed equipment to prevent additional fuel from entering stormwater drains to contain any fuel that had collected in the nearby retention pond.