

NTSB Identification: **CHI06MA121**
14 CFR Public Use
Accident occurred Tuesday, April 25, 2006 in Nogales, AZ
Aircraft: General Atomics Predator B, registration: None
Injuries: 1 Uninjured.

This is preliminary information, subject to change, and may contain errors. Any errors in this report will be corrected when the final report has been completed.

On April 25, 2006, at approximately 0341 mountain standard time, an unregistered Predator B aircraft, collided with the terrain approximately 30 statute miles northwest of Nogales, Arizona. The unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) was registered to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency. The public use flight was operating in visual meteorological conditions. An instrument flight rules flight plan had been filed and activated for the flight. The UAV sustained substantial damage. There were no injuries to persons on the ground. The flight originated from the Libby Army Airfield (HFU), Sierra Vista, Arizona.

The flight was being flown from a ground control station (GCS) located at HFU. The GCS contains two nearly identical consoles, pilot payload operator (PPO)-1, and PPO-2. During a routine mission, a certified pilot controls the UAV from the PPO-1 console and the camera payload operator (typically a U.S. Border Patrol Agent) controls the camera from PPO-2. The aircraft controls (flaps, stop/feather, throttle, and speed lever) on PPO-1 and PPO-2 are identical. However, when control of the UAV is being accomplished from PPO-1, the controls at PPO-2 are used to control the camera.

The pilot reported that during the flight the console at PPO-1 "locked up", prompting him to switch control of the UAV to PPO-2. Checklist procedures state that prior to switching operational control between the two consoles, the pilot must match the control positions on the new console to those on the console, which had been controlling the UAV. The pilot stated in an interview that he failed to do this. The result was that the stop/feather control in PPO-2 was in the fuel cutoff position when the switch over from PPO-1 to PPO-2 occurred. As a result, the fuel was cut off to the UAV when control was transferred to PPO-2.

The pilot stated that after the switch to the other console, he noticed the UAV was not maintaining altitude but did not know why. As a result he decided to shut down the GCS so that the UAV would enter its lost link procedure, which called for the UAV to climb to 15,000 feet above mean sea level and to fly a predetermined course until contact could be established. With no engine power, the UAV continued to descend below line-of-site communications and further attempts to re-establish contact with the UAV were not successful.

[Index for Apr2006](#) | [Index of months](#)