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UPS Cargo Plane Crashes After Takeoff in Louisville, Killing at Least Four and Injuring 11

A McDonnell Douglas MD-11 bound for Honolulu erupted in flames minutes after takeoff from Muhammad Ali International Airport, striking two buildings and igniting 38,000 gallons of jet fuel as investigators search for the cause of the catastrophic crash

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Smoke billows over Grade Lane near Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport after a UPS cargo plane crashed shortly after takeoff on November 4, 2025, igniting a massive fire.

A UPS cargo plane [erupted into a massive fireball](#) shortly after takeoff from Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport on November 4, killing at least four people and injuring 11

others in what Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear described as a "catastrophic crash."

The McDonnell Douglas MD-11, Flight 2976 bound for Honolulu, Hawaii, went down around 5:15 p.m. local time in an industrial area just beyond the runway, striking two buildings and igniting a blaze fueled by approximately 38,000 gallons of jet fuel. The Federal Aviation Administration confirmed the incident in a statement, noting the aircraft carried three crew members and crashed after departing the runway. Beshear, addressing reporters at a late-evening briefing, said, "Anybody who has seen the images and the video know how violent this crash is, and there are a lot of families that are going to be waiting and wondering for a period of time." The death toll is expected to rise as recovery efforts continue into the night.

Emergency responders from the Louisville Metro Police Department, Fire Department, and surrounding agencies converged on the site near Fern Valley Road and Grade Lane, where thick black smoke billowed nearly a mile high, visible from across the city. The plane, a 34-year-old MD-11 freighter that had entered UPS service in 2006, had just returned from a flight to Baltimore earlier in the day, according to Flightradar24 data. Surveillance footage released by local authorities showed the jet lifting off normally before banking sharply, catching fire on one wing, and plummeting into the ground in a thunderous explosion.

The impact damaged Kentucky Petroleum Recycling and Grade A Auto Parts facilities, with initial reports of workers inside at the time of the crash. Louisville Mayor Craig Greenberg, in a statement, said, "Rachel and I are praying for victims... We have every emergency agency responding to the scene. There are multiple injuries and the fire is still burning."

Authorities issued a shelter-in-place order for residents within a five-mile radius of the airport, citing hazardous smoke plumes, and closed Grade Lane indefinitely between key intersections. The Muhammad Ali International Airport, UPS's global hub known as Worldport—where over 12,000 employees process two million packages daily—halted all departures Tuesday night, with arrivals diverted to nearby facilities. UPS, in a brief statement, confirmed, "At this time, we have not confirmed any injuries/casualties," but deferred to the National Transportation Safety Board for details. The NTSB announced it would lead the investigation, with a "go team" en route to examine the wreckage, black boxes, and air traffic recordings. The FAA's preliminary assessment pointed to no immediate cause, but weather was clear, with winds under 10 knots at the time.

Eyewitnesses described a deafening roar followed by a blinding flash, with one airport worker telling WAVE-TV, "It looked like the plane was struggling to gain altitude, then it just dropped like a stone." Videos circulating on social media captured the takeoff, mid-air fire, and ground impact.

The MD-11, a wide-body tri-jet capable of carrying 220,000 pounds of cargo, has a mixed safety record, with 10 fatal accidents since 1991, including a 2009 FedEx crash at Tokyo's Narita Airport that killed both pilots. UPS operates a fleet of 53 MD-11s, making it one of the largest users, and the aircraft involved had logged over 80,000 flight hours without prior incidents, per FAA records.

The crash's location in a populated industrial zone amplified the response, with hazardous materials teams monitoring fuel runoff into nearby waterways and air quality sensors detecting elevated particulates. Beshear activated the state's emergency operations center, coordinating with federal partners, and urged residents to avoid the area. U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy posted on X/Twitter, "Please join me in prayer for the Louisville community and flight crew impacted by this horrific crash."

The incident echoes a 2010 UPS crash at Dubai International that killed both crew members due to a cockpit fire, underscoring cargo aviation's risks with high fuel loads and no passengers.

Louisville, a logistics powerhouse with UPS as its largest employer, grapples with the tragedy's economic ripples, including temporary halts to overnight sorting operations.

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