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National Championship Air Race Pilot Involved in Fatal Crash at Reno-Stead Airport

RENO, Nev. - Officials from the National Championship Air Races have confirmed that Erica Simpson, age 32, a commercial and air race pilot, was involved in a fatal accident today at the Reno-Stead Airport. The accident occurred at around 9 a.m. Saturday morning while Simpson was conducting a check flight in advance of next week's competition.

"Erica was a highly skilled pilot and a fierce competitor, but more importantly she was a friend," said Mike Houghton, President and CEO of the National Championship Air Races. "This has been a difficult day for all of us - Erica's friends and aviation family and we will deeply miss her smile and energy."

Simpson, was raised in Port Wing, Wis. and currently living in Phillipsburg, New Jersey, was readying for her second year as a competitor in the annual air racing event. She previously competed in 2006 as a member of the Biplane Class and was preparing to compete in the Formula One Class, at the helm of the yellow and gray #59 plane "Little Lynn." Simpson was participating in a check flight in advance of competition.

At this time, race officials would not speculate on the cause of the accident. The National Transportation Safety Board and Federal Aviation Administration will conduct the investigation. The Reno-Stead Airfield is a general aviation airport; representatives from the Reno Tahoe Airport Authority have been notified.

Qualifying for the 45th Annual National Championship Air Races begins Monday and the event officially opens to the public on Wednesday. A tribute is currently being planned for Simpson to take place during the opening ceremonies. More details will be provided as they become available.

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