

The KGLA Ground Collision

“It was a dark, stormy night...”

...Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *Paul Clifford*, 1830

I can’t imagine how often I used that well-worn phrase as a simulator instructor or instructor pilot, just to lighten the mood. Oh, how those words came back to haunt me today.

As I reviewed all the available data from the Laguardia (KLGA) ground collision between Air Canada Express Flight 8646 and a firetruck at KLGA late on 23 March 2026, an overload of red flags began to pop up. It was the Swiss Cheese Model for accidents in action. All in a dark and stormy night.

Two pilots dead. Multiple injuries. Lives altered.

No. it wasn’t *exactly* storming. Light Drizzle, 4-7 miles visibility. But it was late at night, a wet runway with lots of runway, structure, and emergency vehicle lights around it. There was also an ongoing emergency with a United 737 Max-8. A yet-as-to-be-identified “odor” causing some illness with cabin crew on that United 737. Add to that an overloaded controller who cleared a firetruck onto an active runway with a landing jet. No time to react.

Much attention will be focused on the controller and the clearance of an emergency vehicle onto an active runway. As it should be. Much will be said, nay *pontificated on* about staffing shortages, the need for better safety equipment, the politics *du jour*. The list goes on.

Perhaps lost in all the noise will be the incipient cause. The “odor” issue that led to an emergency declaration. After two aborted takeoff attempts, I can well imagine there being smells from brake dust, overheated synthetic rubber, jet exhaust, etc. Was the illness that the cabin crew was experiencing due to those fumes or, perhaps, some idiopathic somatic reaction, quite understandable under those circumstances? Or was it something more insidious?

There has been an ongoing debate about the effect of pyrolyzed synthetic oil causing severe illness in crewmembers. Was this one of those cases? More research is needed and I think aircrew members will want to know, sooner than later, without endless debates and speculation.

What is clear is that this tragedy will have an ongoing effect for all who experienced it. A Frontier pilot’s radio transmission says it all:

“That was...that wasn’t good to watch.”

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Peer Support was designed for just this situation.