

Driver Accused of Total CEO's Death Pleads Guilty

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Vladimir Martynenko, the driver of a snow plow, involved in the recent plane crash at Vnukovo airport, sits in a defendants' cage as he attends a court hearing in Moscow, Oct. 23, 2014.

The driver of a snow plow involved in a fatal collision with a jet carrying former CEO of Total oil major Christophe de Margerie has pleaded guilty, his lawyer told the Interfax news agency Thursday.

Vladimir Martynenko was behind the wheel of a snow plow on the night of Oct. 21, 2014 at Moscow's Vnukovo Airport, when it crashed into a Dassault Falcon business jet about to take off for Paris.

All passengers and crew on board the jet, including de Margerie and three French crew members, died in the fire that followed the collision.

Martynenko, who was unhurt, was accused of violating transportation safety rules leading to the deaths of two or more people — a charge that carries a sentence of up to seven years in prison.

Three other defendants in the case — traffic controller Alexander Kruglov, senior engineer Vladimir Ledenev and aircraft controller Roman Dunayev — have also been charged. A fourth defendant, Svetlana Krivsun, who worked as a trainee air traffic controller at the time of the crash, was cleared of charges earlier this month, Interfax reported.

Martynenko's lawyer, Alexander Karabanov, told the Interfax news agency that safety procedures at the airport had not changed since the tragic incident.

Known as the "The Big Mustache," de Margerie was a vocal supporter of cooperation with Russia, a key market for his company.

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