NASA Tests New Windshear Sensor

Pilots repeatedly flew a NASA 737 into dangerous wind conditions over Denver last month to give a laser-based sensor its first sight of the deadly "microbursts" it is designed to detect.

The flights were part of a $20 million project, run by NASA and the Federal Aviation Administration, to warn pilots of the small, intense downdrafts known as microbursts. Microbursts create a condition called "windshear," which can slam a plane to the ground before its pilot can react.

“We are most interested in sensors that will provide a minimum of 20 to 40 seconds warning of windshear conditions,” Program Manager Herbert Schlickenmaier said. “This is enough time for pilots to avoid the hazard.”

Radar antenna in nose of NASA’s 737 is used to detect hazardous windshear.