



TO :

FROM : National Wildfire Coordinating Group

REPLY TO : NWCG@nifc.gov

DATE : 03/17/2005

SUBJECT : SAFETY BULLETIN : Sabine NF Helicopter Incident

Please see the attached 24 Hour and 72 Hour Reports on the helicopter crash with fatalities.



24_hour.doc 72 hour Report.doc



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Washington
Office

14th and Independence Ave. SW.
P.O. Box 96090
Washington, DC 20090-6090

File code: 6730
Route to:

Date: March 12, 2005

Subject: Preliminary (24-Hour) Briefing

To: Chris Pyron, DASHO

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS PRELIMINARY AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Location: Sabine National Forest, Sabine Ranger District, National Forests and Grasslands of Texas

Date of occurrence: March 10, 2005

Time of occurrence: Approximately 1355 CST

Team leader: Janette Kaiser

Mission: Aerial Ignition with Plastic Sphere Dispenser

Activity: Prescribed Fire

Number injured: 0

Number of fatalities: 3

Property damage (such as to vessels, equipment, and structures): Contracted Bell 206 BIII helicopter owned by Brainerd Helicopter Service, Brainerd, Minnesota

Narrative: A helicopter carrying two Forest Service employees and a contract helicopter pilot crashed in Southeast Texas on the Sabine National Forest. Charles Edgar, fire management officer on the Sabine National Forest, John Greeno, Bald Mountain helicopter manager with the Mi-Wok Ranger District on the Stanislaus National Forest in California, and Jose Victor Gonzales, a pilot with Brainerd Helicopter Service in Minnesota, all perished.

An investigation team is in place, lead by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). The Forest Service investigation team is assisting the NTSB. Investigators arrived on March 11 and began the investigation. The on site field portion of the investigation was completed on March 12. The aircraft wreckage has been removed from the accident site. Analysis of the wreckage will continue into the near future. No probable cause has been determined by the NTSB at this time.

cc: Ralph Dorn



Caring for the Land and Serving People



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Department of
Agriculture

Forest
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Washington
Office

14th and Independence Ave. SW.
P.O. Box 96090
Washington, DC 20090-6090

File code: 6730
Route to:

Date: March 14, 2005

Subject: Preliminary (72-Hour) Briefing

To: Chris Pyron, DASHO

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS PRELIMINARY AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Location: Sabine National Forest, Sabine Ranger District, National Forests and Grasslands in Texas

Date of occurrence: March 10, 2005

Time of occurrence: Approximately 1354 CST

Team leader: Janette Kaiser

Mission: Aerial Ignition with Plastic Sphere Dispenser

Activity: Prescribed Fire

Number injured: 0

Number of fatalities: 3

Property damage (such as to vessels, equipment, and structures): Contracted Bell 206 BIII helicopter owned by Brainerd Helicopter Service, Brainerd, Minnesota

Narrative:

On March 10, 2005, approximately 1354 central standard time, a Bell 206B-III helicopter, N85BH, registered to Brainerd Helicopter Service, Inc., and operated by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service (FS), sustained substantial damage when it impacted heavily wooded terrain in the Sabine National Forest near Shelbyville, Texas. The airline transport rated pilot and two USDA Forest Service crewmembers sustained fatal injuries. Visual meteorological conditions prevailed, and the flight/mission was being monitored and conducted in accordance with USFS aviation policies for public use aircraft in fire management operations. The flight departed at 1347 from a field helicopter pad (H1), located approximately 7 miles southeast of the accident site.

On the morning of the accident, the helicopter was assigned to support a prescribed fire within heavily wooded terrain with 50-60 foot high trees near Shelbyville, TX. The prescribed fire was supported by the application of aerial ignition spheres utilizing a cabin mounted plastic sphere dispenser (PSD) machine. According to USFS operating procedures, PSD missions are typically flown at 50-150 feet above the top of vegetation at airspeeds from 20-40 knots. The helicopter was pre-positioned and a mission brief was conducted at Angelina County Airport, Lufkin,

Texas. At 0900, after the mission brief, the helicopter and re-fueling truck re-positioned to H1 (coordinates North 31 degrees 42.110 minutes West 93 degrees 52.540 minutes) and were met by support equipment and personnel from the Sabine National Forest to conduct a prescribed fire mission.

After 45 minutes of aerial ignition work, the PSD machine experienced a sphere jam, and the helicopter returned to H1 to resolve the problem. The helicopter shut down at H1 while the PSD machine problem was resolved.

The helicopter then departed H1 at 1347 to resume the mission. According to USFS dispatch records, at 1352, the mission ignition specialist onboard the aircraft reported by radio that the helicopter was commencing firing operations. At 1354, a radio distress call was heard on the assigned Forest Service tactical frequency by ground personnel. According to USFS personnel, the voice making the distress call appeared to be that of the ignition specialist, not the pilot. The call was, "Mayday, Mayday, Mayday, we are going down." No further communications were heard from the helicopter.

At 1417, the helicopter wreckage was found at coordinates North 31 degrees 45.425 minutes West 94 degrees 00.244 minutes. Immediate rescue operations commenced.

The nearest automated weather observing system at the A.L. Mangham Junior Regional Airport, near Nacogdoches, Texas, located approximately 30 miles southwest of the accident site, reported wind from 250 degrees at 5 knots, 10 statute miles visibility, a clear sky, temperature 22 degrees Celsius, dew point 3 degrees Celsius, and a barometric pressure setting of 29.92 inches of Mercury.

An investigation team is in place, lead by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). The Forest Service investigation team is assisting the NTSB. Investigators arrived on March 11 and began the investigation. The on site field portion of the investigation was completed on March 12. The aircraft wreckage has been removed from the accident site. Analysis of the wreckage will continue into the near future. No probable cause has been determined by the NTSB at this time.

cc: Ralph Dorn



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