



National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Final Report

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|--------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| Location: | Waukon, Iowa | Accident Number: | CEN21LA350 |
| Date & Time: | August 4, 2021, 08:15 Local | Registration: | N775AK |
| Aircraft: | ROBINSON HELICOPTER R44 | Aircraft Damage: | Substantial |
| Defining Event: | Low altitude operation/event | Injuries: | 1 Minor |
| Flight Conducted Under: | Part 137: Agricultural | | |

Analysis

The pilot was conducting an agricultural application pass when the helicopter struck a powerline crossing the cornfield being sprayed. He did not see the line until exiting the helicopter after the accident. Earlier in the morning he had surveyed the area for obstacles but did not observe any lines crossing the field. The pilot commented that his initial survey pass was completed toward the east with the sun “low in the sky and in [his] eyes.” He noted that there were no issues with the helicopter before contacting with the power line. The helicopter sustained substantial damage to the main rotor system, the fuselage, and the empennage.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

The pilot’s failure to maintain adequate clearance from a powerline during an agricultural application pass.

Findings

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| Environmental issues | Wire - Awareness of condition |
| Aircraft | Altitude - Not attained/maintained |
| Personnel issues | Monitoring environment - Pilot |

Factual Information

History of Flight

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| Maneuvering-low-alt flying | Low altitude operation/event (Defining event) |
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Pilot Information

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| Certificate: | Commercial | Age: | 66, Male |
| Airplane Rating(s): | Single-engine land; Single-engine sea | Seat Occupied: | Right |
| Other Aircraft Rating(s): | Helicopter | Restraint Used: | 3-point |
| Instrument Rating(s): | Airplane | Second Pilot Present: | No |
| Instructor Rating(s): | None | Toxicology Performed: | |
| Medical Certification: | Class 2 With waivers/limitations | Last FAA Medical Exam: | September 24, 2020 |
| Occupational Pilot: | Yes | Last Flight Review or Equivalent: | March 15, 2021 |
| Flight Time: | 27652 hours (Total, all aircraft), 3015 hours (Total, this make and model) | | |

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

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|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Aircraft Make: | ROBINSON HELICOPTER | Registration: | N775AK |
| Model/Series: | R44 | Aircraft Category: | Helicopter |
| Year of Manufacture: | 2008 | Amateur Built: | |
| Airworthiness Certificate: | Restricted (Special) | Serial Number: | 1875 |
| Landing Gear Type: | Skid | Seats: | 4 |
| Date/Type of Last Inspection: | March 10, 2021 Annual | Certified Max Gross Wt.: | 2400 lbs |
| Time Since Last Inspection: | 187.9 Hrs | Engines: | 1 Reciprocating |
| Airframe Total Time: | 1973.5 Hrs at time of accident | Engine Manufacturer: | Lycoming |
| ELT: | Not installed | Engine Model/Series: | O-540-F1B5 |
| Registered Owner: | | Rated Power: | 260 Horsepower |
| Operator: | | Operating Certificate(s) Held: | Agricultural aircraft (137) |

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

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|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|
| Conditions at Accident Site: | Visual (VMC) | Condition of Light: | Day |
| Observation Facility, Elevation: | DEH, 1158 ft msl | Distance from Accident Site: | 16 Nautical Miles |
| Observation Time: | 07:55 Local | Direction from Accident Site: | 273° |
| Lowest Cloud Condition: | Clear | Visibility | 7 miles |
| Lowest Ceiling: | None | Visibility (RVR): | |
| Wind Speed/Gusts: | 0 knots / 0 knots | Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual: | / |
| Wind Direction: | | Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual: | / |
| Altimeter Setting: | 30.14 inches Hg | Temperature/Dew Point: | 16° C / 16° C |
| Precipitation and Obscuration: | No Obscuration; No Precipitation | | |
| Departure Point: | | Type of Flight Plan Filed: | None |
| Destination: | Waukon, IA | Type of Clearance: | None |
| Departure Time: | | Type of Airspace: | Class G |

Wreckage and Impact Information

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|---------------------|---------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Crew Injuries: | 1 Minor | Aircraft Damage: | Substantial |
| Passenger Injuries: | N/A | Aircraft Fire: | None |
| Ground Injuries: | N/A | Aircraft Explosion: | None |
| Total Injuries: | 1 Minor | Latitude, Longitude: | 43.261185, -91.375664 |

Administrative Information

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| Investigator In Charge (IIC): | Sorensen, Timothy | | |
| Additional Participating Persons: | Patrick Blaskovich; FAA Flight Standards; Ankeny, IA | | |
| Original Publish Date: | November 16, 2021 | Investigation Class: | 4 |
| Note: | The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident. | | |
| Investigation Docket: | https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=103624 | | |

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), established in 1967, is an independent federal agency mandated by Congress through the Independent Safety Board Act of 1974 to investigate transportation accidents, determine the probable causes of the accidents, issue safety recommendations, study transportation safety issues, and evaluate the safety effectiveness of government agencies involved in transportation. The NTSB makes public its actions and decisions through accident reports, safety studies, special investigation reports, safety recommendations, and statistical reviews.

The Independent Safety Board Act, as codified at 49 U.S.C. Section 1154(b), precludes the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an incident or accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report. A factual report that may be admissible under 49 U.S.C. § 1154(b) is available [here](#).