

Davies Creek Ridge Helicopter Mission FLA

The objective of the Davies Creek Ridge Project is to install a weather station in the Upper Davies Creek Valley.

After initial recon to establish the best location for the weather station site, this mission required—at a minimum—three separate trips to: deliver equipment, drill and set the bolts in epoxy, install the weather station and program the equipment, and, finally, to verify that the station is working.



Timeline

1213 hours – Helicopter Manager (HMGB) and Pilot depart Juneau for Davies Creek.

1227 hours – HMGB tries to contact PNW crew to discuss landing conditions.

1230 hours – HMGB and Pilot land and begin shutdown at LZ at Davies Creek.

Approx. 1230 hours – Helicopter lifts, rotates, and violently flips over.

1238 hours – HMGB tries to contact dispatch via radio—is unsuccessful. Successfully makes contact via cell phone. HMGB informs dispatch that an “accident” has occurred. HMGB takes charge of accident scene—accounts for PPE, radios, and survival equipment. HMGB assesses potential LZs for evacuation of personnel from accident site and confirms alternate location for LZ for rescue helicopter.

Some of the Lessons from Participants

During the cool down process, the ship is more vulnerable to the adverse impacts of high winds as compared to during flight speed or at full shutdown. This cool down is a brief but uniquely risky point in time during the flight operation. The lesson learned is that the shutdown/ cool down period has increased risk compared to either flight idle or complete shutdown.

This incident led to several ideas the Tongass National Forest managers *will do next time* and good ideas for managers nationwide. The first is to provide extra emphasis to passengers to keep seatbelts, gloves, and helmets on—until the rotor is nearly completely stopped. Secondly, during this accident, when the rotor blades hit the ground, pieces of the blade and ground debris became deadly projectiles—presenting a serious life threatening hazard to anyone located nearby. We are extremely fortunate that the passengers who were to be picked up were still busy setting up a weather station some 300 yards from the landing zone.

While this crash resulted in no injuries, it nevertheless was a very serious accident. There are multiple additional valuable lessons in this FLA report.

For Full Report:

http://wildfirelessons.net/documents/Davies_Creek_Ridge_Heli_mission_FLA.pdf