

Mark Ward
Aviation Accident Investigator
Office of Aviation Safety - Alaska Region

Date: 7/2/2025

Subject: ANC25LA064 Pilot Interview

Contact: Laura Deatherage - Pilot

Summary of a phone conversation with Laura.

Laura started her flight training in Alaska and received her private pilot certificate in March of 2023. She moved to Hawaii to finish out her training and received her CFI rating the first week in May 2024. She moved to Minnesota for her first job as a flight instructor and part 91 tour pilot. She had that job till about November 2024 and then moved to Florida to do flight instruction. She moved back to Alaska in February 2025 and started training with Elevate in mid-April. She estimated that she has about 650 flight hours in Robinson helicopters. She has no sling load experience. Her high-altitude experience is limited to her training during her private certificate training and her training with Elevate. The accident flight was her sixth (6) day of work. The 23rd of June was her last day off.

She was living about 10 minutes away from the lodge. The day of the accident she woke up at 545am, and the pilot meeting started at 7am. She then did a preflight of the helicopter and the first flight took off at 8am. She did multiple 1-2-hour flight tours of the glacier. She had about 10-15 mins between the last tour group and the accident group flight. She flew the passengers up to a dog camp and then waited for them to be done with the dog tour.

Before takeoff she assessed the flat-light conditions and determined that she could see better with sunglasses on. On takeoff, she lifted straight up, and she was thinking she should make a left pedal turn after she clears everything because of the flat light conditions. She had an R44 on her right side, the dog camp was in front and an AStar helicopter was on the left. She picked up high enough to clear all of them and slowly began a left pedal turn. About a quarter to half through the turn the "full

throttle light" came on in the cockpit. She was very surprised to see the light. She directed all her attention inside the cockpit and saw the engine rpm and rotor were exceeding their limitations. When she looked back outside everything was white with no visual references and before she knew it the helicopter contacted the ground. The skids made contact first in almost a level attitude, and she tried to run it on, but the nose of the skids dug into the snow and the helicopter spun 180 degrees and rolled to the left on to its side.

The full throttle light came on when the helicopter was at about 50ft above the ground in OGE (out of ground effect) hover. The ground elevation at departure was 4,755ft MSL (means sea level)

Micheal Neely, CEO of Elevate was also on the call and provided the following information.

The governor has slow response rates at high altitudes and corrective inputs must be made through collective. Robinson Helicopter Safety Tip 13 focuses on managing RPM and avoiding over speeds, particularly when flying at higher altitudes.

When flying at altitudes above 3,000 or 4,000 feet, the throttle in a Robinson helicopter is often wide open, and RPM needs to be controlled using the collective pitch. Under these conditions, the throttle/collective correlation may not be as effective, and the governor's response can be slower.