

Cory Maxon
Air Safety Investigator
Aviation Safety – Central Region

Date: March 10, 2025

Subject: CEN25LA105

Contact: Travis Blake, Gunner

On March 10, 2025, Mr. Blake spoke with the investigator in charge regarding the helicopter accident that occurred on February 27, 2025. Mr. Blake stated that the purpose of the flight was to conduct elk capture surveying for South Dakota Fish, Game, and Parks. Mr. Blake was occupying the rear right passenger seat as the gunner for the capture operation. The gunner's purpose is to tranquilize the elk from the maneuvering helicopter as the pilot positions the helicopter to match the speed of the target elk. The helicopter was being flown about 30 feet above ground level when Mr. Blake fell out of the moving helicopter.

Mr. Blake stated that a preflight safety brief is conducted before every operation. He discussed how he secures his seat shoulder restraints by tucking them behind the seat, and his lap belt is buckled and laid flat against the seat to secure it during elk capture operations. Mr. Blake said he had flown with the pilot for several years and had conducted capture operations with the pilot a few times. He reported that the supplemental restraint system's anchor point is secured to the helicopter by the pilot before each flight in a designated position and that he "clips in" his end of the harness to that anchor point before the flight. Mr. Blake stated that the pilot had selected the harness tie-down point. It was the same tie-down point used on previous flights.

Mr. Blake stated that he could not recall how he fell out of the helicopter.