



Cory Maxon
Air Safety Investigator
Aviation Safety - Central Region

Date: March 1, 2025

Subject: CEN25LA105

Contact: Blake Malo, Pilot

On March 1, 2025, Mr. Malo spoke with the investigator in charge regarding the helicopter accident that occurred on February 27, 2025. He explained that the purpose of the flight was to conduct elk capture surveying for South Dakota Fish, Game, and Parks. Mr. Malo stated that this was the first flight and elk capture of the day.

Mr. Malo stated that he maneuvered the helicopter to match the speed of the target elk so the gunner could effectively tranquilize it. He stated that he occupied the right-side pilot seat, and the gunner occupied the rear-right passenger seat during the accident. The helicopter was about 30 feet above ground level and about 20-30 knots of indicated airspeed when the gunner fell out of the moving helicopter.

Mr. Malo stated he felt a shift in the helicopter's center of gravity. He looked out of the helicopter and saw the gunner falling from it. He immediately landed the helicopter, called emergency services, and waited with the gunner for them to arrive.

When asked about the preflight safety brief and the use of restraints, Mr. Malo stated that he conducts a safety brief before every flight. He briefed the gunner that the helicopter's restraint system is the primary restraint and that any supplemental harness is secondary. Mr. Malo stated that he allows the gunner to place the anchor point for the supplemental restraint system at their discretion because it is not required by any Federal Aviation Regulation. Mr. Malo then discussed that other gunners typically use other various locations as the anchor point for the supplemental restraint system.