

John E. White

Statement of What Occurred before Accident on 4/26/22

Woke up 4 am and headed to compound to pick up equipment and helicopter trucks. Moved to staging site at opposite side of lake. After moving to staging site, ground crews were getting organized and mixed. Pilots were untying helicopters and pre-flighting the helicopters. After everything was pre-flighted, the pilots got together to discuss procedures and how the day would look as far as communication and which part of the lake we were each assigned. Also discussed not to fly over any houses, only fly over the undeveloped parts from staging area to the spray site. From that point we made sure ground crews were mixed and ready to go with no issues. We began our flights around 7 am.

I took one load and applied it and returned to the truck to readjust nozzles for calibration reasons. As I was on truck getting second load, Chief Pilot, Caleb, radioed and advised me not to come because second pilot, Sean, was in the water. We shut down the helicopter and waited for Sean to be rescued from the lake. We were unsure of why Sean went down. As Sean was being transported to the hospital, Caleb and I as well as several FWC employees who were overseeing the job discussed what would be sprayed, how it would be sprayed and what would be left out due to being down a helicopter.

Around 12:15, we resumed spraying. Around 2:45 I stopped for a short break approximately 10 minutes for water and a snack. Around 3 pm I noticed that it was difficult to determine the distance I was flying from the water level. I advised Caleb to be careful because the water conditions were slick and it was hard to tell how close you were to the water. Around 6:30 pm I noticed that there were no FWC airboats remaining on the water. We continued spraying and approximately 6:45 I carried my last load. I was cleaning the last edge up when I noticed Caleb leaving his truck and heading towards me. I called on the radio and advised where I was and I noticed he made a turn away from me. At that point I glanced back at the AgNav GPS. That is the last thing I remember before going into the water.

I would also like to note that there was nothing mechanically wrong with the airframe, flight controls, or engine that caused the accident on the helicopter that I was flying.

[REDACTED]