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Date: 8/24/2023, 8/30/2023

Subject: ERA23LA309

Contact: Brett James Smith (Pilot in Command)

The individual noted above provided the following information via a telephone call. The below contents are a summary of what was reported:

- He does not remember much surrounding the accident.
- He recalls waking up, several feet from the helicopter, on the ground. He does not remember any unusual helicopter noises, annunciators, or other details pertaining to the flight. Nor does he remember descending through the forest.
- He reported that the accident day, was a "catch up" day due to being behind schedule. The helicopter had been down for maintenance, which led to delays.
- He recalled starting the day about 8AM or 9AM. He then recalled that he flew for about 3 hours, and then shut down for 15-20 minutes. He checked all fluid levels and recalled that everything seemed normal, and no engine fluids were needed.
- He described that the helicopter had a known oil leak and they had to keep adding oil over the past few weeks, but during this stop, the oil was not low.
- He does not remember whether he was maneuvering to drop a load or had already dropped the load immediately preceding the descent and impact with terrain.
- He said he is not completely sure, but he may have been maneuvering to drop a bag.
- He recalled that for the last two months he had been operating around this area in Ohio. Prior to these two months of work, he had never flown in this part of the country.
- He said the accident could be due to a mechanical problem with the helicopter, or maybe it was a wind shift. He does not remember. He did not recall that weather was a factor during the earlier flights in the day.

Mr. Smith was asked an additional question with email. Below were the questions and his response.

NTSB Question: I had one follow-up question. Do you recall if the drop zone you were navigating to, was that DZ in an open clearing, or was it in wooded terrain that you were to release the bag? We are trying to understand whether the drop was to occur down into the tree canopy, or perhaps an open field. We found that the hook was still attached and closed for your awareness.

Mr. Smith Response: I believe that right where I went down was the drop zone. Ty, the DO [Director of Operations], told me that according to the tracking I was right on top of that DZ. And to the best of my recollection that was the spot.

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