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AS-Eastern Region Aviation

Date: 4/1/2024

Subject: ERA24LA148, Accident Event Information

Contact: Jeffrey W. Burch, FAA IIC

On April 1, 2024, the pilot provided a written statement via email to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in response to a request for additional information regarding the circumstances of the accident. The NTSB investigator subsequently discussed the contents of the statement with the FAA to support the ongoing investigation.

The pilot reported that, at the time of the in-flight event, the external cutting saw was positioned well above the ground and higher than nearby power lines. The flight involved routine tree trimming operations, during which the pilot made multiple passes from one side of the line to the other, confirming that the helicopter's altitude was consistently above the height of the lines. The pilot stated that he was making small, deliberate swipes to remove limbs while assessing their fall trajectory and monitoring rotor wash patterns to prevent limbs from being pushed into the power lines. He stated that this process included evaluating the effect of head, tail, and crosswinds to determine the most favorable cutting conditions.

According to the pilot, there were no indications of settling or downdrafts at any point during the flight, including at the time of the event. He described the flight as routine, with winds that aided rather than hindered operations. The helicopter remained in smooth and stable control throughout.

The pilot recalled hearing a distinct and alarming "boom," followed by a sudden settling sensation. He instinctively pulled his head into the cockpit and maneuvered slightly forward toward a shorter tree line in anticipation of impact. He noted that the sequence of events was vivid and memorable. The pilot further stated that he had experienced numerous prior ground strikes with the saw during his career, some of

which were strong enough to dislodge his headset, but those incidents never produced an audible noise. In contrast, the current event featured a loud boom not consistent with prior ground contacts. He emphasized that no impact occurred before the boom was heard, and he maintained full control of the aircraft up to that point.

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