



FATALITY DESCRIPTION

FATALITY INCIDENT

Two Wilson Utility Construction (Wilson) employees perished on June 2, 2020 while doing Human External Cargo (HEC) work under a helicopter owned by PJ's Helicopter Services of Redding, California and contracted by the utility company, PG&E, which Wilson was contracted with.

INCIDENT BACKGROUND

The crew was in the process of reconductoring a 115kV double circuit line. There was also another 115kV line, parallel to the line our crew was working. For simplicity, the two lines run north to south. The crew was working on the east circuit that was de-energized. The circuit on the other side of the tower (west circuit) was energized. The Wilson crew had reconductored the west side line in the past, so our crew was very familiar with the area. The terrain is steep, ridge-like terrain with the towers often at the tops of ridges, spanning ravines. In this case, there was a rewind machine setup to the north end, going up a steep hill to the first tower. There was a long, approximately 1200-foot span to the next tower, spanning a deep ravine with a small dirt road at the bottom. The hillsides were covered in dried grasses and oak trees.

INCIDENT DESCRIPTION

On June 2, 2020, at about 1:00 p.m., PG&E's contracted helicopter was dispatched to the transmission tower to lift the two employees off the tower they had just finished double socking and the helicopter was to transport them to the puller site. Wilson's puller operator watched, as is normal, as the two employees were lifted off the tower on a long line, then up and over the west energized circuit, and then as they proceeded towards the west to clear all the lines. It is at that point the puller operator started to move down the right of way to the puller site. He lost sight of the helicopter when he started going over the hill.

A couple of minutes later, the rest of the crew saw smoke over the hill. They got the water buffalo and headed to the top of the hill to fight the fire and notified 911. They proceeded to get the hose out, started spraying the burning landscape and noticed that the lower conductor on the west side line that had been energized, was broken, and laying on the ground. Realizing that is what started the fire, they attempted to make several calls on the radio to the helicopter with no response. The crew then realized that there might have been a crash.

The crew found the wreckage of the helicopter, the contract pilot, from PJ's Helicopter Services and the two Wilson crewmembers, in the bottom of the canyon away from the fire approximately 800 feet ahead online from the structure.

ONGOING INVESTIGATION

Preliminary findings indicate that there was a rotor strike on the bottom phase of the adjacent energized circuit. The cause of the rotor strike has not been determined.

All parties are cooperating in the investigation as to the cause of the accident which is being conducted by the FAA and the NTSB.





National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Preliminary Report

Location:	Fairfield, CA	Accident Number:	WPR20LA163
Date & Time:	06/02/2020, 1327 PDT	Registration:	N65PJ
Aircraft:	Bell 206	Injuries:	3 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 133: Rotorcraft Ext. Load		

On June 2, 2020, at 1327 Pacific daylight time, a Bell 206L3 Helicopter, N65PJ, was destroyed when it was involved in an accident near Fairfield, California. The pilot and 2 passengers were fatally injured. The helicopter was operated as a Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)* Part 133, rotorcraft external load (Human External Cargo (HEC)) operation.

The helicopter was operated by PJ Helicopters under contract from Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) to perform power line repair work.

According to PG&E, the linemen had completed work for the day and had been picked up by the pilot. The lineman would have been connected to an external cable and airlifted back to the landing zone (LZ). During transition to forward flight, the helicopter contacted the lower power line, and impacted the ground.

A witness to the accident reported that after the helicopter impacted the power line, it impacted the ground and rolled downhill. The helicopter came to rest in a ravine.

The helicopter was recovered to a secure facility for further examination.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Bell	Registration:	N65PJ
Model/Series:	206 L3	Aircraft Category:	Helicopter
Amateur Built:	No		
Operator:	P J Helicopters Inc	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	Rotorcraft External Load (133)

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual Conditions	Condition of Light:	
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KVCB, 109 ft msl	Observation Time:	1253 PDT
Distance from Accident Site:	5 Nautical Miles	Temperature/Dew Point:	15° C / 11° C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	Calm / ,
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility:	10 Miles
Altimeter Setting:	29.95 inches Hg	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Departure Point:	Fairfield, CA	Destination:	Fairfield, CA

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	2 Fatal	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	3 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	38.309722, -122.033889 (est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Tealeye Cornejo
Additional Participating Persons:	Jeffrey Snider; Federal Aviation Administration; Sacramento, CA John McCoy; Pacific Gas and Electric; Sacramento, CA Seth Gunsauls; PJ Helicopters, Inc.; Red Bluff, CA Jeff Johnson; Wilson Construction; Canby, OR
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.