



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Washington  
Office

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P.O. Box 96090  
Washington, DC 20090-6090

File Code: 6730

Date: August 27, 2002

Route To:

Subject: Expanded (72-Hour) Briefing  
Sheep Creek Incident, Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest  
August 24, 2002

To: Bradley Powell, Regional Forester, Northern Region

**THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS PRELIMINARY AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE**

Name of injured or deceased (if the next of kin have been notified): N/A

Preliminary factual findings:

- Substantial damage was found to the top and bottom of both main rotor blades on Helicopter N832AH, a Bell 206L1/C30P, at the end of the operational period on August 24, 2002.
- The Bell model type is different than initially reported in the 24 hour brief, and is corrected by this report.
- When the damage was discovered by the pilot, after the last flight of the day, he was not sure when or where the event had occurred.
- During the day, prior to the damage being discovered, the helicopter had been used for reconnaissance and bucket work on the Sheep Creek Incident and a local initial attack mission on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest.
- A tree with the top cut out was found at one of the bucket drop sites where three eyewitnesses reported the helicopter, bucket and cable making contact with the tree during the drop.

Narrative:

On August 24, 2002, the pilot of helicopter N832AH noticed damage to the top and bottom of both main rotor blades when he finished his last flight for the day. The helicopter was assigned to the Sheep Creek Incident, but had also flown an initial attack mission for the Forest at the end of the day. Initial investigation on site has narrowed the focus to one area of the fire where several specific bucket drops occurred.

The 24-hour Accident brief was issued on August 26, 2002.

Helicopter N832AH was released to the contractor at 2030 on August 26, 2002.

The accident remains under investigation by both the NTSB and the Forest Service.



Members of the Forest Service team include:

Jeanne Higgins – Team Leader  
Pat Wilson – Qualified Technical Investigator (QTI)  
Scott Cochran – Scribe, QTI Trainee  
Bill McMillan – Maintenance, Helicopter Specialist  
Steve Rossiter – Bureau of Indian Affairs Liaison

/s/ Jeanne M. Higgins  
JEANNE M. HIGGINS  
District Ranger, Stevensville Ranger District

cc:  
Eddie Morris, Regional Aviation Safety Manager  
Official case file