



Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Waterford, California	Accident Number:	WPR25LA112
Date & Time:	March 15, 2025, 11:00 Local	Registration:	N402TA
Aircraft:	Enstrom 280FX	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Defining Event:	Low altitude operation/event	Injuries:	1 Serious, 1 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Personal		

Analysis

A witness video showed the helicopter flying very low over a lake before it impacted the water. During postaccident interviews with news outlets, the pilot stated he and a passenger were flying the helicopter low over clear water, when his “depth perception got a little off”, and he drove the helicopter into the water. The helicopter fuselage, tail boom, and main rotor blades were substantially damaged. The pilot did not complete a NTSB Form 6120.1 Accident/Incident Report.

Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be:

The pilot’s failure to maintain clearance from water while operating at a low altitude.

Findings

Personnel issues	Decision making/judgment - Pilot
Personnel issues	Aircraft control - Pilot
Aircraft	Altitude - Incorrect use/operation
Aircraft	Altitude - Not attained/maintained
Environmental issues	Water/moisture - Effect on equipment

Factual Information

History of Flight

Maneuvering-low-alt flying	Low altitude operation/event (Defining event)
Maneuvering-low-alt flying	Miscellaneous/other

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	Age:	71,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	Single-engine land	Seat Occupied:	Unknown
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Helicopter	Restraint Used:	
Instrument Rating(s):	None	Second Pilot Present:	
Instructor Rating(s):	None	Toxicology Performed:	
Medical Certification:	Unknown	Last FAA Medical Exam:	
Occupational Pilot:	UNK	Last Flight Review or Equivalent:	
Flight Time:			

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Enstrom	Registration:	N402TA
Model/Series:	280FX	Aircraft Category:	Helicopter
Year of Manufacture:	2006	Amateur Built:	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	Serial Number:	2122
Landing Gear Type:	Skid	Seats:	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:		Certified Max Gross Wt.:	2600 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:		Engines:	1
Airframe Total Time:		Engine Manufacturer:	
ELT:		Engine Model/Series:	
Registered Owner:	On file	Rated Power:	
Operator:	On file	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KMOD,87 ft msl	Distance from Accident Site:	14 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	10:53 Local	Direction from Accident Site:	260°
Lowest Cloud Condition:		Visibility	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	Overcast / 4200 ft AGL	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	/	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:		Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	30.17 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	12°C / 7°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:		Type of Flight Plan Filed:	None
Destination:		Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:		Type of Airspace:	Class G

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Minor	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	1 Serious	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:		Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Serious, 1 Minor	Latitude, Longitude:	37.66654,-120.6631(est)

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Baker, Daniel
Additional Participating Persons:	Mike McMilan; FAA; Fresno, CA
Original Publish Date:	July 3, 2025
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class 4
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.nts.gov/Docket?ProjectID=199873

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating every civil aviation accident in the United States and significant events in other modes of transportation—railroad, transit, highway, marine, pipeline, and commercial space. We determine the probable causes of the accidents and events we investigate, and issue safety recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. In addition, we conduct transportation safety research studies and offer information and other assistance to family members and survivors for each accident or event we investigate. We also serve as the appellate authority for enforcement actions involving aviation and mariner certificates issued by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and US Coast Guard, and we adjudicate appeals of civil penalty actions taken by the FAA.

The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for an accident or incident; rather, as specified by NTSB regulation, “accident/incident investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties ... and are not conducted for the purpose of determining the rights or liabilities of any person” (Title 49 *Code of Federal Regulations* section 831.4). Assignment of fault or legal liability is not relevant to the NTSB’s statutory mission to improve transportation safety by investigating accidents and incidents and issuing safety recommendations. In addition, statutory language prohibits the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report (Title 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b)). A factual report that may be admissible under 49 *United States Code* section 1154(b) is available [here](#).