



Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report

Location:	West Alton, MO	Accident Number:	CEN25FA307
Date & Time:	August 7, 2025, 10:59 Local	Registration:	N173AL
Aircraft:	Hughes 369D	Injuries:	2 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 133: Rotorcraft ext. load		

On August 7, 2025, about 1059 central daylight time, a Hughes (MD Helicopters) 369D helicopter, N173AL, was destroyed when it was involved in an accident near West Alton, Missouri. The pilot and crewmember were fatally injured. The helicopter was operated as a Title 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 133 external load flight.

According to the available Automatic Dependent Surveillance – Broadcast (ADS-B) data for the helicopter, the pilot departed from the north bank of the river about 1025. He appeared to make three trips to the powerline support tower on the south bank of the river and then return to the original position on the north bank. The final ADS-B data point was recorded at 1035. No further ADS-B data was recorded.

A witness located on the tow vessel reported that the helicopter pilot and lineman appeared to be attempting to attach a safety marker (orange ball) to one of the power lines. The lineman appeared to be standing on the left skid, wearing a safety harness. On the second attempt, as the pilot brought the helicopter closer to the power lines at which time the tail of the helicopter struck the line.

From the witness' vantage point, it appeared that the tailboom partially separated from the airframe with a portion of it "dangling." The helicopter then pivoted, and the cockpit hit the line which caused sparks similar to when an electrical transformer fails. The helicopter then fell onto the barge deck and a postimpact fire ensued. The witness did not recall seeing the helicopter on fire during flight, only the sparks when the fuselage struck the line.

The crew moved the tow vessel alongside the barge and used its pilothouse fire station to extinguish the fire. A subsequent inspection of the barge did not reveal any structural damage or any release of the barge contents.

The helicopter main wreckage consisted of the fuselage, engine, main rotor transmission, main rotor hub, and forward portion of the tail boom (fragmented into two sections). One main rotor blade was located about 150 ft from the main wreckage. A 7-foot segment of a second main rotor blade was located about 176 ft from the main wreckage. Finally, a main rotor blade tip, about 6-inches in length, was located about 26 ft from the main wreckage. The remaining main rotor blades and the aft portion of the tail boom, including the tail rotor and horizontal stabilizer, were not present with the wreckage and presumed to have landed in the river.

The video data recorder onboard the tow vessel was retained for examination and download. A search of the river bottom in the vicinity of the accident site using side-scan sonar equipment is planned. The helicopter wreckage was retained for possible further examination.



Figure 1 – Accident Site with Powerline Support Tower



Figure 2 – Main Wreckage on Barge Deck



Figure 3 – Main Wreckage on Barge Deck

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Hughes	Registration:	N173AL
Model/Series:	369D	Aircraft Category:	Helicopter
Amateur Built:			
Operator:	On file	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	Rotorcraft external load (133)
Operator Designator Code:	4XLL		

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	VMC	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	KALN, 544 ft msl	Observation Time:	10:50 Local
Distance from Accident Site:	4.7 Nautical Miles	Temperature/Dew Point:	30°C / 21°C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	5 knots / 0 knots
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility:	10 miles
Altimeter Setting:	30.19 inches Hg	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	NONE
Departure Point:	Alton, IL (PVT)	Destination:	Alton, IL (PVT)

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	2 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Destroyed
Passenger Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Fire:	On-ground
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	2 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	38.86152,-90.14327

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Sorensen, Timothy
Additional Participating Persons:	Klarann Voegelé; FAA Flight Standards; St. Ann, MO Nick Shepler; Rolls Royce; Indianapolis, IN
Investigation Class:	Class 3
Note:	