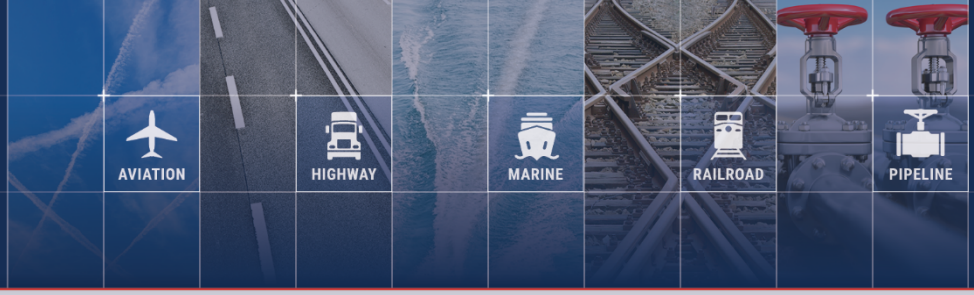

Aviation Investigation Final Report

Location:	Cedar City, Utah	**Accident Number:**	WPR26LA199
Date & Time:	May 23, 2026, 07:21 Local	**Registration:**	N917SU
Aircraft:	Bell 206-L4	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Defining Event:	Loss of control in flight	**Injuries:**	2 Minor
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Instructional		

Analysis

The flight instructor, who was flying from the left seat, reported that during the initial hover, the helicopter's engine governor reference rpm indicated about 104%. To adjust the governor reference rpm, the instructor reached across to the right-seat collective-mounted governor INCR/DECR switch. As he contacted the switch, the instructor failed to maintain helicopter control, and the helicopter pitched nose up, moved aft, and descended.

The flight crew reported that the helicopter contacted the ground, bounced, and began to spin out of control. Airport surveillance video showed the helicopter moving aft while descending before contacting the taxiway. The helicopter subsequently became airborne, rotated to the right, and impacted the ground. During the impact sequence, the tailboom and main rotor system separated from the helicopter.

The pilot reported that there were no preaccident mechanical malfunctions or failures with the helicopter that would have precluded normal operation.

Probable Cause and Findings

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

The flight instructor's failure to maintain helicopter control while manipulating the engine governor reference rpm adjustment during hover operations, which resulted in a loss of control and impact with the ground.

Findings

Personnel issues	Aircraft control - Pilot
Aircraft	Pitch control - Not attained/maintained

Factual Information

History of Flight

Takeoff	Loss of control in flight (Defining event)
Takeoff	Abnormal runway contact
Takeoff	Tailstrike

Pilot Information

Certificate:	Flight instructor	**Age:**	32,Male
Airplane Rating(s):	None	**Seat Occupied:**	Left
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Helicopter	**Restraint Used:**	4-point
Instrument Rating(s):	Helicopter	**Second Pilot Present:**	Yes
Instructor Rating(s):	Helicopter; Instrument helicopter	**Toxicology Performed:**	
Medical Certification:	Class 1 Without waivers/limitations	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	February 10, 2026
Occupational Pilot:	Yes	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	February 25, 2026
Flight Time:	1424 hours (Total, all aircraft), 219 hours (Total, this make and model), 1347 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 196 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 61 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 4 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Student pilot Information

Certificate:	Private	**Age:**	25,Male
Airplane Rating(s):		**Seat Occupied:**	Right
Other Aircraft Rating(s):	Helicopter	**Restraint Used:**	4-point
Instrument Rating(s):	Helicopter	**Second Pilot Present:**	Yes
Instructor Rating(s):	None	**Toxicology Performed:**	
Medical Certification:	Class 1 Without waivers/limitations	**Last FAA Medical Exam:**	September 16, 2025
Occupational Pilot:	No	**Last Flight Review or Equivalent:**	June 17, 2025
Flight Time:	222 hours (Total, all aircraft), 12 hours (Total, this make and model), 156 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 28 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 15 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 2 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Bell	**Registration:**	N917SU
Model/Series:	206-L4	**Aircraft Category:**	Helicopter
Year of Manufacture:	1994	**Amateur Built:**	
Airworthiness Certificate:	Normal	**Serial Number:**	52527
Landing Gear Type:	High skid	**Seats:**	7
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	May 12, 2026 Continuous airworthiness	**Certified Max Gross Wt.:**	4450 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	47 Hrs	**Engines:**	1 Turbo shaft
Airframe Total Time:	15484.9 Hrs as of last inspection	**Engine Manufacturer:**	Rolls-Royce
ELT:	C126 installed, activated, did not aid in locating accident	**Engine Model/Series:**	250-C30P
Registered Owner:	Southern Utah University	**Rated Power:**	420 Horsepower
Operator:	Southern Utah University	**Operating Certificate(s) Held:**	Rotorcraft external load (133)

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual (VMC)	**Condition of Light:**	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	CDC,5590 ft msl	**Distance from Accident Site:**	0 Nautical Miles
Observation Time:	06:53 Local	**Direction from Accident Site:**	14°
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	**Visibility**	10 miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	**Visibility (RVR):**	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	4 knots / None	**Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:**	None / None
Wind Direction:	50°	**Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:**	N/A / N/A
Altimeter Setting:	30.05 inches Hg	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	10°C / 1°C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	No Obscuration; No Precipitation		
Departure Point:	Cedar City, UT	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	Company VFR
Destination:	Cedar City, UT	**Type of Clearance:**	None
Departure Time:		**Type of Airspace:**	Class E

Airport Information

Airport:	Cedar City Regional CDC	**Runway Surface Type:**	
Airport Elevation:	5622 ft msl	**Runway Surface Condition:**	Dry
Runway Used:		**IFR Approach:**	None
Runway Length/Width:		**VFR Approach/Landing:**	None

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	2 Minor	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:		**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:		**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	2 Minor	**Latitude, Longitude:**	37.70097,-113.09885

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Slinker, Stanley
Additional Participating Persons:	Kelly Allred; FAA; SLC, UT
Original Publish Date:	September 3, 2026
Last Revision Date:	
Investigation Class:	Class 4
Note:	The NTSB did not travel to the scene of this accident.
Investigation Docket:	https://data.ntsb.gov/Docket?ProjectID=203051

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.