



# National Transportation Safety Board Aviation Accident Final Report

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<b>Location:</b>	Benchmark, MT	<b>Accident Number:</b>	SEA07TA202
<b>Date &amp; Time:</b>	07/16/2007, 0910 MDT	<b>Registration:</b>	N667HP
<b>Aircraft:</b>	Bell UH-1H	<b>Aircraft Damage:</b>	Substantial
<b>Defining Event:</b>	Controlled flight into terr/obj (CFIT)	<b>Injuries:</b>	1 Minor
<b>Flight Conducted Under:</b>	Public Aircraft		

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## Analysis

The purpose of the flight was to carry an external load in support of firefighting activity. The pilot departed from a nearby helibase with a visibility of 5 miles under moderate smoky conditions. While en route to another landing zone, the visibility deteriorated and the pilot reported difficulty seeing the landing zone. The pilot successfully landed at the landing zone without incident and set down a load of supplies. The ground crew then attached a load of firefighting equipment that was to be returned to the helibase. As the pilot transitioned to forward flight to depart from the landing zone, the visibility dropped, and he reportedly lost all visual reference. The helicopter settled into trees and impacted the ground, coming to rest on its right side. In the area of the landing zone at the time of the accident, the visibility was reported to be fluctuating between 1/4 to 1 mile due to smoke.

## Probable Cause and Findings

The National Transportation Safety Board determines the probable cause(s) of this accident to be: Dense smoke/haze which restricted the pilot's visibility and the pilot's failure to maintain aircraft control during the emergency descent resulting in impact with terrain.

## Factual Information

On July 16, 2007, at 0910 mountain daylight time, a Bell UH-1H helicopter, N667HP, sustained substantial damage when it impacted terrain following a loss of control while departing a remote landing zone near Benchmark, Montana. The commercial pilot, the sole occupant, sustained minor injuries. The helicopter was registered to Leading Edge Aviation LLC of Clarkston, Washington, and under the operational control of the United States Forest Service (USFS). Visual meteorological conditions prevailed and a company flight plan was filed for the local public use flight. The purpose of the flight was to carry an external load in support of fighting the Ahorn fire on the Bob Marshal Wilderness Area within the Lewis and Clark National Forest.

According to information provided by USFS personnel, the pilot flew the helicopter from the Benchmark Helibase departing with a visibility of 5 miles under moderate smoky conditions. While en route to the landing zone, the visibility deteriorated and the pilot reported difficulty seeing the landing zone. The pilot successfully landed at the landing zone without incident and set down a load of supplies. The ground crew then attached a load of firefighting equipment that was to be returned to the Helibase. As the pilot transitioned to forward flight to depart from the landing zone, the visibility dropped, and he reportedly lost all visual reference. The helicopter settled into trees and impacted the ground, coming to rest on its right side. In the area of the landing zone at the time of the accident, the visibility was reported to be fluctuating between 1/4 to 1 mile due to smoke.

## History of Flight

Initial climb	Controlled flight into terr/obj (CFIT) (Defining event)
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## Pilot Information

<b>Certificate:</b>	Flight Instructor; Commercial	<b>Age:</b>	49, Male
<b>Airplane Rating(s):</b>	Single-engine Land	<b>Seat Occupied:</b>	Left
<b>Other Aircraft Rating(s):</b>	Helicopter	<b>Restraint Used:</b>	Seatbelt
<b>Instrument Rating(s):</b>	Airplane	<b>Second Pilot Present:</b>	No
<b>Instructor Rating(s):</b>	Airplane Single-engine; Helicopter; Instrument Airplane	<b>Toxicology Performed:</b>	No
<b>Medical Certification:</b>	Class 2 With Waivers/Limitations	<b>Last FAA Medical Exam:</b>	11/01/2006
<b>Occupational Pilot:</b>	Yes	<b>Last Flight Review or Equivalent:</b>	02/01/2007
<b>Flight Time:</b>	13500 hours (Total, all aircraft), 673 hours (Total, this make and model), 10966 hours (Pilot In Command, all aircraft), 98 hours (Last 90 days, all aircraft), 50 hours (Last 30 days, all aircraft), 2 hours (Last 24 hours, all aircraft)		

## Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	Bell	Registration:	N667HP
Model/Series:	UH-1H	Aircraft Category:	Helicopter
Year of Manufacture:		Amateur Built:	No
Airworthiness Certificate:	Restricted	Serial Number:	65-09952
Landing Gear Type:	Skid	Seats:	2
Date/Type of Last Inspection:	07/01/2007, AAIP	Certified Max Gross Wt.:	9500 lbs
Time Since Last Inspection:	13.5 Hours	Engines:	1 Turbo Shaft
Airframe Total Time:	8959.1 Hours at time of accident	Engine Manufacturer:	Allied Signal
ELT:	Installed, not activated	Engine Model/Series:	T53-703
Registered Owner:	Leading Edge AviationLLC	Rated Power:	1700 hp
Operator:	United States Forest Service	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	

## Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	Visual Conditions	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:		Distance from Accident Site:	
Observation Time:		Direction from Accident Site:	
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Clear	Visibility	5 Miles
Lowest Ceiling:	None	Visibility (RVR):	
Wind Speed/Gusts:	Calm /	Turbulence Type Forecast/Actual:	/
Wind Direction:		Turbulence Severity Forecast/Actual:	/
Altimeter Setting:	30.25 inches Hg	Temperature/Dew Point:	18° C / 4° C
Precipitation and Obscuration:	Heavy - In the Vicinity - Smoke		
Departure Point:	Benchmark, MT	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	Company VFR
Destination:		Type of Clearance:	None
Departure Time:	MDT	Type of Airspace:	

## Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Minor	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Fire:	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	Aircraft Explosion:	None
Total Injuries:	1 Minor	Latitude, Longitude:	47.527500, -113.034167

## Administrative Information

<b>Investigator In Charge (IIC):</b>	Georgia R Struhsaker	<b>Report Date:</b>	11/29/2007
<b>Additional Participating Persons:</b>	Dean Allport; FAA FSDO; Helena, MT		
<b>Publish Date:</b>	02/27/2020		
<b>Investigation Docket:</b>	NTSB accident and incident dockets serve as permanent archival information for the NTSB's investigations. Dockets released prior to June 1, 2009 are publicly available from the NTSB's Record Management Division at <a href="mailto:pubinq@ntsb.gov">pubinq@ntsb.gov</a> , or at 800-877-6799. Dockets released after this date are available at <a href="http://dms.nts.gov/pubdms/">http://dms.nts.gov/pubdms/</a> .		

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The Independent Safety Board Act, as codified at 49 U.S.C. Section 1154(b), precludes the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an incident or accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report. A factual report that may be admissible under 49 U.S.C. § 1154(b) is available [here](#).