



National Transportation Safety Board

Office of Aviation Safety – Central Region

Interview Summary: CEN15FA210, 27 April, 2015

Location: Austin, Texas

Interviews of fire department personnel were conducted by: Aaron Woolverton
Division Chief AFD Risk Management and Thayer Smith Battalion Chief AFD
Safety Office.

The interviews were recorded and copies of the audio files were obtained by the NTSB
IIC. During the discussions personnel made the following points:

Several fire department emergency personnel were with the patient, when the STAR
Flight helicopter arrived on scene. Emergency personnel reported that the rescuer was
inserted below their location and had to climb slightly uphill to the patient. One of the
persons stated that there was plenty of lighting, but didn't recall if people were using
headlamps. They had also retrieved the backboard for the rescuer. He added that then the
rescuer said she was about to call the helicopter back for pickup, he asked what else do
you need, and she responded was to just get the catch hook.

One of the other individuals got the hook and handed it to her. He added that he didn't
see the hookup and she gave the "thumbs up" and they took off into the air with no
hesitation. The rescuer and patient looked "okay". They moved into a small tree and
looked like the rescuer was protecting the patient. He added that they stopped, lowered
and moved over, or moved over and lowered at the same time; that it looked controlled or
surgical, and then they took off into the sky.

Another one of the fire department personnel added, that he asked the rescuer if she
needed one of them to safety her gear, and she responded that she was fine. He added
that he didn't see the hookup or signal; the rescuer and victim departed quickly and
everything looked like other calls by STAR Flight. He stated that the patient's left foot
went into trees a little bit, and he thought, that might hurt. They repositioned to get out of
the trees, and then disappeared above the tree line. He added the rescuer looked chest
level with the patient; he had seen three of these (type rescues) and it didn't look
abnormal.

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Another fire department personnel reported that he was holding the HRV for the rescuer, she then took it from him and it looked like she hooked up the Bauman bag and backpack, but he didn't see her hookup, but he didn't notice everything that was going on. He saw the "thumbs up" and they takeoff. He added that when the rescuer and patient went into the tree, he thought he heard someone holler; he was the only one that heard it, but figured it was the patient because every time they moved the patient or something hit her ankle, she'd holler out. He added that he didn't hear it clear enough to know who or what was hollered. He added that during the lift off from the ground, the rescuer was hunched over the patient. When they got into the tree they stopped, he couldn't tell if they were lowered down, but they moved over and they were gone.

Another emergency personnel added that the rescuer had the HRV in her possession. She called the helicopter in and the hook came, it had two spot lights and a big orange boom around it. One of the other individual handed her the hook, and she hooked into a bull ring; it happened fast. Thumbs up, and then they start lifting her, on the rise up, they go into the tree slightly, looked like they lowered her; backed up a couple feet to clear the tree, and they were gone. He added they were riding good, it looked like the rescuer was slightly above the patient, and that she was over the patient protecting the patient from the tree, and departed without a hiccup.

Additional fire department emergency personnel were located at the landing zone (7 meter location) and positioned around the track so the helicopter would have a clear spot to land. They reported that the helicopter came in, entered a hover, and lowered the patient to the ground. Typically, the helicopter crew will disconnect the patient, so initially; they did not approach the helicopter while it was in a hover. The noise of the helicopter also made radio transmissions difficult to hear. One of the personnel was able to radio contact with helicopter crew to confirm they wanted one of the firemen to disconnect the patient. The person reported that there was one connection to get the big hoist off; the big bull ring had the medical bag and the Bauman bag on it. After disconnecting the patient, the helicopter landed nearby. He added that the crew chief asked for the medical bag and stated that they needed to go look for their rescuer. He added that he asked the patient if she remembered, at what point was the rescuer not with you. He stated that the patient responded that she did not know that the rescuer was with her at any point.