



Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report

Location:	Kekaha, HI	Accident Number:	ANC24FA063
Date & Time:	July 11, 2024, 13:05 Local	Registration:	N144KW
Aircraft:	ROBINSON HELICOPTER R44	Injuries:	3 Fatal
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Business		

On July 11, 2024, about 1305 Hawaii-Aleutian standard time, a Robinson R44 helicopter, N144KW, sustained substantial damage when it was involved in an accident near Kekaha, Hawaii. The pilot and two passengers were fatally injured. The helicopter was operated as a *Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations Part 91* sightseeing flight.

The accident helicopter, owned by Aloha Helicopter Tours LLC, dba Ali'I Air Tours, was conducting a doors-off, sightseeing flight around the island of Kauai. The helicopter departed from the Lihue Airport (LIH), at about 1231 for a one-hour tour of the island of Kauai.

According to archived Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) ADS-B data, after the helicopter departed from LIH, it initially proceeded west-southwest before turning to a northerly heading. As the helicopter neared the northern shoreline of the island of Kauai, archived ADS-B data was terminated. According to local operators, ADS-B coverage along the northern coast of Kauai is limited due to mountainous terrain.

Witnesses hiking on the Kalalua Trail, which is situated along the Na Pali Coast on the northern shores of Kauai, reported that during a brief rest stop overlooking the coast, strong gusty wind conditions prevailed. They reported that as they rested, a "huge" and sudden gust of wind blew over them, which was followed by a very loud "bang" noise. As their attention was drawn to the source of the loud noise, they saw the helicopter wreckage freefalling into the ocean in two sections, a main fuselage section, and the tail boom section. The witnesses said that the helicopter wreckage sank moments after striking the water, about one quarter of a mile offshore.

The U.S. Coast Guard, utilizing side scan sonar technology, conducted a comprehensive underwater search that covered roughly a 1,000-square-yard area, and noted various anomalies throughout the search area. After reviewing dozens of side scan sonar targets, a more focused search was conducted utilizing a Fusion, Strategic Robotic System (SRS) remote

operated vehicle (ROV) on the three most probable targets. During the ROV search, the Coast Guard was able to locate the severed tail boom section of the helicopter in about 77 ft of water, but the main fuselage was not found. See figure 1



Figure 1. Robinson R44, N144KW, tail boom assembly (US Coast Guard Photo)

A separate underwater search and recovery effort is pending. Once the wreckage has been recovered, a detailed wreckage examination will be conducted by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigator-in-charge (IIC), along with a helicopter aerospace engineer, as well as other parties to the accident investigation.

An initial review by an NTSB senior meteorologist indicated a strong pressure gradient on the north shore of Kauai, which resulted in strong gusting easterly winds. A detailed NTSB weather study is pending.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	ROBINSON HELICOPTER	Registration:	N144KW
Model/Series:	R44	Aircraft Category:	Helicopter
Amateur Built:			
Operator:	Ali'i Air Tours	Operating Certificate(s) Held:	None
Operator Designator Code:			

Meteorological Information and Flight Plan

Conditions at Accident Site:	VMC	Condition of Light:	Day
Observation Facility, Elevation:	PHLI,105 ft msl	Observation Time:	12:53 Local
Distance from Accident Site:	21 Nautical Miles	Temperature/Dew Point:	28°C /21°C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Few / 4800 ft AGL	Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:	17 knots / , 20°
Lowest Ceiling:		Visibility:	10 miles
Altimeter Setting:	30.04 inches Hg	Type of Flight Plan Filed:	
Departure Point:	Lihue, HI (LIH)	Destination:	Lihue, HI (LIH)

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	Aircraft Damage:	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	2 Fatal	Aircraft Fire:	Unknown
Ground Injuries:		Aircraft Explosion:	Unknown
Total Injuries:	3 Fatal	Latitude, Longitude:	22.183594,-159.64597

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Ward, Mark
Additional Participating Persons:	Seth Cossel; FAA
Investigation Class:	Class 3
Note:	