Aviation Investigation Preliminary Report

Location:	Key Biscayne, FL	**Accident Number:**	ERA27FA034
Date & Time:	November 4, 2026, 11:20 Local	**Registration:**	N272JW
Aircraft:	ROBINSON HELICOPTER COMPANY R44 II	**Injuries:**	1 Fatal, 2 Serious
Flight Conducted Under:	Part 91: General aviation - Aerial observation		

On November 4, 2026, about 1120 eastern standard time, a Robinson R44 II helicopter, N272JW, was substantially damaged when it was involved in an accident near Key Biscayne, Florida. The commercial pilot was fatally injured and two passengers sustained serious injuries. The helicopter was being operated as a Title14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 91 aerial photography flight.

The two passengers contracted with the helicopter operator to provide photography and videography of boats that were participating in a “Poker Run” high-performance offshore powerboating event. The photographer was seated in the forward left seat, and the videographer was seated in the aft left seat; both of their doors were removed to facilitate photography and videography. The flight departed from North Perry Airport (HWO), Hollywood, Florida, about 1045.

According to preliminary ADS-B data provided by the FAA, the helicopter flew south-southeast about 20 miles to Biscayne Bay, west of Key Biscayne, Florida, where it maneuvered for about 15 minutes. According to the two passengers, they flew through a rain shower prior to arriving over the bay but avoided the heaviest rain that appeared to contain a thunderstorm to the east. The weather had cleared once they arrived over their designated area.

According to the photographer, they typically remained focused on each boat for about 30 seconds to 1 minute. After shooting their first boat, they turned back to the north and looked for another boat to photograph. Once a boat was located, they flew low and parallel off the boats starboard side, then turned towards the boat at a 45° angle ahead of it, to get a “good shot” of the boat as it passed underneath them. The videographer stated that the helicopter got very close to the boat as it passed under them, then immediately after, he observed the rotor blades strike the water and felt the helicopter impact the water.

This information is preliminary and subject to change.

According to witnesses on two separate boats in the vicinity of the accident site, the helicopter was operating at a low altitude and making low altitude turns “extremely” close to the surface of the water. As the helicopter flew adjacent to a boat it banked and the rotor blades contacted the water followed immediately by the fuselage. The emergency floatation system activated during the impact, and the helicopter rolled over and came to rest floating upside down partially submerged in about 10 ft of water. Several witnesses in nearby boats made distress calls on the marine emergency channel and immediately went to the scene to assist the pilot and two passengers.

The helicopter sustained substantial damage to the fuselage, the main rotor system, the tail boom, and the tail rotor system. The fuselage was split open and peeled aft exposing the entire cockpit area and seats.

Subsequent examination of the wreckage revealed that one of the main rotor blades (A) was missing its outboard 6 ft, and the opposing main rotor blade (B) was damaged by impact forces. Both main rotor blades remained attached to the hardware on the main rotor hub assembly. The pitch change horn to blade A was separated by impact forces. The pitch change horn and pitch link remained attached to blade B. The pitch links remained attached to their respective swashplate mounts. The rotor blades operated freely on the teetering hinge and there were no indications of mast bumping.

The three hydraulic servos on the main rotor system (two forward and one aft) were located. The two forward servos were secured on their mounts, and the aft servo was broken free. All three servos sustained minor impact damage but were otherwise functional and were manually operated to correspond with normal blade control operation. The main rotor gearbox and mast assembly sustained catastrophic impact damage; the case was fractured exposing the internal gears.

The clutch assembly was slightly damaged and canted a few degrees to the right when looking forward. The gear motor assembly was installed, torqued and undamaged. The drive belts were in place but loose, consistent with impact damage. The tail rotor shaft was separated from the main transmission by impact forces. The gear box was undamaged and sealed. Normal tail rotor operation was observed when manually manipulated.

Flight control continuity was confirmed to all flight control surfaces through the controls and their respective servos, actuators, linkages, and pushrods.

The engine crankshaft was manually operated through the direct drive squirrel cage blower system. Rotation of the crankshaft confirmed crankshaft and valvetrain continuity. In addition, thumb compression and suction were attained on all six cylinders. All twelve spark plugs displayed normal worn colorization when compared to the Champion Check a Plug chart. A mixture of about 3 gallons of oil and sea water was drained from the engine.

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A review of the helicopter's most recent airframe and engine maintenance records showed that a 100-hour inspection was conducted on August 5, 2026. At that time the helicopter had been operated for about 2,500 total hours and the engine had been operated for about 400 hours total time since overhaul.

The digital photography and videography equipment that was being operated during the flight was ejected during the accident sequence and not recovered.

The helicopter wreckage was retained for further examination.

Aircraft and Owner/Operator Information

Aircraft Make:	ROBINSON HELICOPTER COMPANY	**Registration:**	N272JW
Model/Series:	R44 II	**Aircraft Category:**	Helicopter
Amateur Built:			
Operator:	GLOBAL AERIALS INC	**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:	MIA,30 ft msl	**Observation Time:**	11:00 Local
Distance from Accident Site:	9 Nautical Miles	**Temperature/Dew Point:**	25°C /24°C
Lowest Cloud Condition:	Few / 1500 ft AGL	**Wind Speed/Gusts, Direction:**	8 knots / None, 70°
Lowest Ceiling:	Broken / 2700 ft AGL	**Visibility:**	6 miles
Altimeter Setting:	29.98 inches Hg	**Type of Flight Plan Filed:**	
Departure Point:	Hollywood, FL (HWO)	**Destination:**	Hollywood, FL (HWO)

Wreckage and Impact Information

Crew Injuries:	1 Fatal	**Aircraft Damage:**	Substantial
Passenger Injuries:	2 Serious	**Aircraft Fire:**	None
Ground Injuries:	N/A	**Aircraft Explosion:**	None
Total Injuries:	1 Fatal, 2 Serious	**Latitude, Longitude:**	25.670462,-80.200318

This information is preliminary and subject to change.

Administrative Information

Investigator In Charge (IIC):	Mccarter, Lawrence
Additional Participating Persons:	Michelle Griffin; FAA FSDO; Mirimar, FL Thom Webster; Robinson; CA Mike Childers; Lycoming; Williamsport, PA
Investigation Class:	Class 3
Note:	

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