

**Aviation Safety Investigation Report  
198903794**

**Robinson R22**

**27 July 1989**

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**NOTE: All air safety occurrences reported to the ATSB are categorised and recorded. For a detailed explanation on Category definitions please refer to the ATSB website at [www.atsb.gov.au](http://www.atsb.gov.au).**

**Occurrence Number:** 198903794  
**Location:** 10km South of Mareeba QLD  
**Date:** 27 July 1989  
**Highest Injury Level:** Serious  
**Injuries:**

**Occurrence Type:** Accident  
**Time:** 745

|              | Fatal    | Serious  | Minor    | None     |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Crew         | 0        | 1        | 0        | 0        |
| Ground       | 0        | 0        | 0        | -        |
| Passenger    | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> |

**Aircraft Details:** Robinson R22  
**Registration:** VH-NWJ  
**Serial Number:** 322  
**Operation Type:** Aerial Work  
**Damage Level:** Substantial  
**Departure Point:** Mareeba QLD  
**Departure Time:** 0740  
**Destination:** Lyndhurst Station QLD

**Approved for Release:** 24th October 1989

#### **Circumstances:**

For the ferry flight, the pilot placed an overnight bag on the passenger seat, leaned a swag and fuel pump against the seat and secured the lot with the seat belt. His pre-flight control checks revealed that full control travel was available for the collective and cyclic controls. During the climb the swag slipped and came to rest against the cyclic control. At this stage it was not causing any control interference. The pilot intended to fly past the lee side of a mountain and found that the swag was now restricting movement of the cyclic pitch control. The seat belt was unfastened to reposition the swag. At the same time, the helicopter encountered some turbulence. The swag fell onto the collective pitch control lever, pushing it nearly all the way down. The helicopter descended out of control with both the cyclic and collective controls fouled. The pilot managed to regain partial control just before impact and, following the heavy landing, rolled the helicopter into a steeply sloping rock face. The pilot commented later that the critical point in the scenario was reached when he unlatched the seatbelt to fix an annoying, but not serious problem at an inappropriate time. This accident was not the subject of a formal on scene investigation.

#### **Significant Factors:**

The following factors were considered relevant to the development of the accident

1. The pilot's swag and fuel pump were inadequately restrained.
2. The swag shifted during flight causing minor control interference.
3. The pilot made an inappropriate decision to re-adjust the swag in flight.
4. Further control interference led to loss of control of the helicopter.