

# collision kills 9



UNDERWATER

BLOOMBERG NEWS PHOTO

Nine people were presumed killed when a sightseeing helicopter and a small plane collided over the Hudson River about noon yesterday, authorities said, resulting in the deadliest crash over the waterway in recent memory.

The plane, bound for Ocean City, N.J., and carrying a pilot and two passengers, including a child, may have slammed into the back of the helicopter, which had five Italian tourists and a pilot aboard, Mayor Michael Bloomberg said at a news conference.

But, he added, “nothing is a fact” until a National Transportation Safety Board investigation is complete. The federal agency yesterday dispatched a 10-member team to investigate the incident.

By yesterday evening, three bodies had been recovered from the debris off the crash site near West 14th Street in Manhattan and taken to the city medical examiner’s office, a spokeswoman for the office said. The pilots and passengers have not been identified.

A pilot for Liberty Helicopter Sightseeing Tours, which owns the helicopter involved in the crash, saw the plane approaching the helicopter in the air and tried to alert the pilots via radio, New York City Police Commissioner Ray Kelly said. The warning wasn’t heard or didn’t happen in time, he said.

Divers searched the waters between Manhattan and New Jersey yesterday afternoon as dozens of bicyclists, runners and skaters stopped to watch the rescue efforts on one of the summer’s most beautiful days. A wheel from one of the aircraft lay on Hoboken’s Sinatra Drive, The Associated Press reported.

The hull of the helicopter was located and buoys were placed around it, NTSB chairwoman Debbie Hersman said at a news conference. The airplane had not yet been located, she said. Earlier in the day, Bloomberg said he had been told there were bodies inside the wreckage.

“We’re going to stay out there until the job is done,” Kelly said, noting the river’s “demanding conditions,” such as limited visibility and strong tides and currents.

Hersman said the NTSB investigation would attempt to answer questions about the crash, including where the aircraft were located at the time of the incident and how high the plane and helicopter were when the collision happened. Divers would be back

This story was reported by **Rick Brand, Matthew Chayes, Christina Hernandez, Sarah Portlock** and **Pervaiz Shallwani**. It was written by Hernandez.

in the water today, she said. Hersman said she had not been made aware of any distress calls.

Authorities said the helicopter had taken off from the West 30th Street heliport just before the collision. Company officials declined to comment yesterday. The chopper was a Eurocopter AS 350, Federal Aviation Administration spokesman Jim Peters said.

The plane, a Piper PA-32 owned by LCA Partnerships of Fort Washington, Pa., had taken off from Teterboro Airport in New Jersey at 11:54 a.m. and headed south along the Hudson before the collision, authorities said. Port Authority officials said the plane had landed at the airport about 11:20 a.m. with the pilot aboard to pick up two passengers.

At about noon yesterday, Newark Liberty International Airport lost the plane on its radar, Peters said. Then, the FAA began receiving reports of a plane down in the river, he said.

Deena Glanzberg, visiting the city from Miami, was having lunch with her son at a sidewalk cafe near Chelsea market, when she saw the collision over the Hudson. “The helicopter — it just stopped in midair,” she said. “It was just a drop. It was not a big crash.”

According to a witness, the “wings of the plane were probably severed by the rotors of the helicopter,” Bloomberg said.

The collision happened along a largely uncontrolled airspace where small planes and helicopters flying below 1,100 feet do not need air traffic control clearance, according to the FAA. Instead, it is mostly up to pilots to communicate with each other.

Bloomberg said it was unclear if those aboard the aircraft involved in the crash had communicated with each other. Authorities don’t expect to recover cockpit voice or data recorders from either aircraft because on-demand operators are not required to carry them.

Part of the investigation, he said, would be to determine if the aircraft pilots were listening to the radio frequency used by those flying along the corridor to avoid crashing.

In 1997, a rotor on a Liberty Tours sightseeing helicopter clipped a Manhattan building, forcing an emergency landing. No one was hurt.



THE PIPER PA-32

**Length** 27 feet, 9 inches  
**Height** 9 feet, 6 inches  
**Wing span** 32 feet, 10 inches  
**Range** 1,000 miles  
**Maximum speed** 190 mph  
**Ceiling** 14,600 feet  
**Capacity** 6



EUROCOPTER AS 350

**Length\*** 36 feet  
**Height** 10 feet, 4 inches  
**Range** 420 miles  
**Maximum speed** 150 mph  
**Ceiling** 8,360 feet  
**Capacity** 6  
 \*Fuselage only

## THE HUDSON CORRIDOR

Helicopters are free to travel any route at less than 1,100 feet. City has no authority over the airspace and the Federal Aviation Administration does not police below 1,100 feet. Helicopter tours operate seven days a week in formations of two or three helicopters. Popular destinations include the Statue of Liberty, Ellis Island and New York Harbor.

## THE LATEST

**The crash.** A helicopter and single-engine fixed-wing plane collide over the Hudson River.

**The toll.** Nine people, six from the helicopter and three from the plane, are dead.

**The investigation.** Three of the bodies have been recovered and investigators have found the copter’s wreckage. A team from the National Transportation Safety Board has arrived in New York and will head up the search.

THE RULES FOR SMALL AIRCRAFT

A4-5