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FROM : National Wildfire Coordinating Group

REPLY TO : NWCG@nifc.gov

DATE : 07/28/2003

SUBJECT : SAFETY BULLETIN : July 26 Helicopter Accident

The attached is a news release from a Helicopter accident that occurred at Whiteriver Arizona . This accident resulted in the fatalities of a firefighter and the pilot of the aircraft .



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
Ft. Apache Agency

Whiteriver, AZ (July 27, 2003) – Yesterday at approximately 10:30 a.m., while responding to a smoke report in the Aspen Ridge area of the White Mountain Apache Reservation, a helicopter carrying a pilot and three helitack crewmembers went down. Killed in the crash were pilot Jess Pearce, 50, of Peoria, AZ and helitack crew member Randall Bonito, Jr., 31, of Whiteriver, AZ. Injured in the crash were Kristy Johnson, 30, of Cibecue, AZ and Floyd Walker, 37, of the 7 mile community of Whiteriver. All three passengers are members of the White Mountain Apache Tribe.

Both Walker and Johnson were transported to a trauma center in Phoenix, AZ shortly after the accident. Walker is listed in guarded but stable condition, while Johnson's condition is listed as fair.

An investigative team headed by the National Transportation Safety Board is in place and currently investigating the incident. The Bell 206L3 helicopter was contracted by Airwest Helicopters of Phoenix, AZ.

This tragic event has deeply saddened the firefighting community and the members of the White Mountain Apache Tribe and the Ft. Apache Agency of the BIA who worked so closely with all involved. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families.

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