

Russian Helicopter Crashes Into Sea, 5 Missing But 11 Safe

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An island in the Sea of Okhotsk

Russian investigators say a helicopter crashed into the Sea of Okhotsk in the far east, and five of the 16 people on board are missing and presumed dead.

The pilot reported by satellite phone that he and 10 others made it to a tourist base on the Tugur Peninsula, the Interfax news agency said, citing the emergency services.

Investigators said the Mi-8 helicopter took off Saturday from the Polina Osipenko village in the Khabarovsk region and was scheduled to land near a lake on the Tugur Peninsula, but crashed into the sea about 30 meters from the shore. Investigators believe the helicopter's engine may have failed, Russian media cited sources at the regional transport watchdog as saying.

Another theory circulating in the media was that the helicopter's crew may not have coped with the poor weather conditions — heavy fog had reportedly enveloped the area where it crashed into the sea.

The helicopter was transporting the head of Russian company VTB Leasing along with his two deputies on a trip to the rugged Shantar Islands, the company confirmed. The managers of the transport and oil and gas equipment leasing company were among the survivors, the company told the TASS news agency.

Seven of the surviving passengers were taken by plane to a hospital in the region's biggest city Khabarovsk, while one other passenger and three crew members remained at the scene to help a rescue operation involving divers, RIA Novosti reported.

The helicopter crash is the latest in a series of aviation accidents to have befallen Russia in recent months. On Aug. 9, a helicopter collided with a seaplane over the Istra reservoir outside Moscow, killing nine people. Investigators said that pilot error was the likely cause of the fatal accident.

(AP, MT)

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