

Helicopter crash: Passenger found dead in wreckage near Mt Carbine in far north Queensland



Photo: The 25-year-old passenger of the helicopter was found dead this morning. (Facebook: Rescue 510)

A passenger who was found dead in the wreckage of a north Queensland helicopter crash was a contractor for state's National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), hired to maintain their remote facilities.

The 25-year-old plumber, from Kewarra Beach in Cairns, was flying with his pilot from Cardwell to western Cape York when their chopper came down near Mount Carbine on Friday afternoon, sparking an intense fire in the forest.

An emergency beacon alerted authorities and the pilot was winched to safety nearly two hours later, however rescuers did not realise there was a passenger.

"The condition the pilot was located in didn't allow for accurate questioning to be undertaken," Senior Sergeant James Coates said.

"We had to make a significant number of inquiries and investigative leads and processes in order to obtain that there was a second person."

The pilot, who was also a contractor for NPWS from Marlborough, is in a critical but stable condition in the Cairns hospital.

Once authorities realised there was a passenger, a second rescue operation was launched on Friday afternoon, but the crash site could not reach due to poor visibility.

The terrain was "extremely harsh, inhospitable, and very difficult to land in," Senior Sergeant Coates said.

Up to 50 people were involved in a third attempt at a ground and air rescue on Saturday morning, with the plumber's body being found in the wreckage at 10:30am.

Senior Sergeant Coates said it is not known if he died on impact, adding that there will be a forensic examination of the helicopter to determine the cause of the crash.

"Due to the extent of the crash, it made it extremely difficult to locate the deceased," he said.

"They [the family] are absolutely distraught as you can imagine."

Senior Sergeant Coates said the pair were on a self-planned route, taking in the facilities that needed maintaining.

Smoke alerted authorities to the crash site

Queensland Government Air Service spokesman Troy Alders said smoke from the aircraft alerted authorities to the crash site yesterday, where there was "no obvious sign" of a second person.

"We have a lot of contractors up here that get flown around in helicopters whether it be looking after parks and wildlife camps or whether they look after the towers up around the hills," Mr Alders said.

Mr Alders said the pilot was extremely lucky to be found alive.

"I think that his family and friends will be elated that he was able to be found so soon and that his injuries were not life threatening," he said.