

St. Petersburg Times ONLINE TAMPA BAY

[Weather](#) | [Sports](#) | [Forums](#) | [Comics](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Calendar](#) | [Movies](#)

Copter crashes into roof

By RYAN MEEHAN

© St. Petersburg Times, published June 4, 2002

TAMPA -- A helicopter crash-landed onto the roof of a one-story home late Monday, spilling fuel into the house and sending a piece of the craft into a child's empty bedroom.

TAMPA -- A helicopter crash-landed onto the roof of a one-story home late Monday, spilling fuel into the house and sending a piece of the craft into a child's empty bedroom.

"I just heard a loud boom," said homeowner Toni Duran. "There was fuel everywhere. The gas smell was so bad I couldn't breathe. I could hear them yelling, 'Get whatever you can.' "

Duran, her husband and brother-in-law were in the house during the 9:45 p.m. crash but were not injured. Fire officials said as much as 17 gallons of fuel leaked into the home.

Duran's two children were spending the first week of vacation at their father's home, so they were not at home when a 2-3 foot piece of the landing skid fell off the copter and onto the 13-year-old girl's bed.

Greg Reeher, an off-duty Hillsborough County firefighter who lives nearby, heard the crash and ran to the scene. He climbed a ladder onto the roof, checked the pilot's vital signs and stayed with the man until emergency crews arrived.

The pilot was identified as Michael Antinori, 30, of Tampa. He was alone in the red, two-seat helicopter, flying from Vandenberg Airport in east Hillsborough to Clearwater, Tampa fire spokesman Bill Wade said.

Reeher said the pilot told him the aircraft lost power.

Witnesses said they saw the craft dipping up and down over Tacoma Trails Park just south of the house before hearing the helicopter crash into the house at 4733 Whiteway Drive.

Seth Fowler saw the helicopter struggling to maintain its altitude and followed it on his bike.

"It was getting lower and lower and lower, and then I heard a loud boom and a pop," Fowler, 15, said.

The Federal Aviation Administration is investigating the crash.

Antinori was not seriously injured, Wade said. He could be seen smiling as emergency workers wheeled him into an ambulance before transporting him to Tampa General Hospital.

"He wasn't hurting or complaining of anything," Reeher said.

Wade said the bright red "kit" helicopter was equipped for two passengers and was not an experimental craft, it was probably custom-made.

He said Duran and her family are lucky that the 17 gallons of fuel that leaked into the house did not catch fire.

Duran said that immediately after the crash her husband turned off the electricity in the house.

Fuel seeped into the ceiling and into the bedroom below, Wade said, and is the source of most of the damage. The structural damage, he said, is "easily repairable."

Firefighters doused the roof and inside of the house with foam retardant to prevent a fire.

It was the third crash of a helicopter in the Hillsborough County this year.

A Tampa police helicopter also made a harrowing landing April 14 when the craft lost power and smacked into Tampa Bay near the southern tip of MacDill Air Force Base, slightly injuring the pilot his passenger.

The 30-year-old Hughes OH6 helicopter was on routine patrol when it lurched to one side and the tail rotor stopped, sending it into a spin. The helicopter crashed into shallow water and was destroyed.

In January, another Tampa police Hughes OH6 helicopter was heavily damaged during a training exercise that simulated an in-flight engine failure. The two police pilots on board suffered minor injuries.

© Copyright, St. Petersburg Times. All rights reserved.