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## **In Sakha (Yakutia) pilot of Mi-8T found guilty of safety breach claiming lives of 24 people**



A court has recognized the evidence gathered by the East Siberian Transport Investigations Directorate of the Russia's Investigative Committee sufficient to convict Mikhail Belkov, captain of a Mi-8T helicopter of Polar Airlines that crashed on 2 July 2013 in Ust-Yana District in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). He was found guilty of a crime under part 3 of article 263 of the RF Criminal Code (violation of traffic and operation rules of air transport inflicting by negligence death of two or more persons).

The court and investigators revealed that on 2 July 2013, about 5 AM, a Mi-8T helicopter operated by Polar Airlines flight No 9949 traveling from the village of Deputatsky to the village of Ust-Yana crashed 45 km to the northwest of the village of Deputatskoye. The helicopter was carrying 28 people, including 3 crewmembers and 25 passengers, including 12 children, with 2 babies among them. 24 people were killed in the crash, 2 more sustained bad injuries. 3 crew members and 3

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passengers survived the crash. A woman and her baby that survived the accident died later at hospital of their injuries and hypothermia. A 17-year-old teenager underwent treatment in a hospital for a very long time. The airlines suffered over 13 million rubles worth damage.

The circumstances of the crash became known during the preliminary investigation. When the helicopter flew 40-50 km from the village of Deputatskoye, the weather suddenly got worse, it became foggy, it started sleeting, the visibility was extremely poor – no more than 5 meters. The crew decided to fly back to Deputatsky. During the maneuver the helicopter hit the ground with its back rotor pylon, crashed and burst into flames. The crew could not rescue the passengers as the door to the passenger compartment was blocked. The crew got out through side windows of the cockpit.

During the probe the investigators questioned over 40 witnesses and ran over 20 forensic medical, DNA, fire, technical, chemical, flight tests.

Investigators found that the helicopter was not overloaded, the weather in the village of Deputatsky was fine for flying. The Mi-8T was in good technical order and had been prepared for the flight in accordance with the requirements of operation and maintenance regulations. The Mi-8T captain Mikhail Belkov had the technical opportunity to provide a safe flight. Both the captain and crew were prepared for the flight and had enough expertise to transfer passengers.

The evidence gathered by the investigators, including the results of the tests made it possible to conclude that the direct cause of the crash was collision with the ground while performing a flight in mountainous area on the altitude lower than the safe one caused by breach by the captain requirements of the Federal Aviation Rules, namely not making timely decision to fly back, to fly to a reserve airfield or flying according to instrument flight rules after the weather worsened to the unsafe point.

After the investigation had been started, Belkov was suspended from flights and dismissed from Polar Airlines.

The court sentenced Belkov to 6.5 years to be served in a penal settlement.

05 March 2015

Page address: <https://en.sledcom.ru/news/item/901832>