

Beat: Local

One of N. Ireland's richest people among 4 dead in UK helicopter crash

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USPA News - Entrepreneur and politician Lord Ballyedmond, one of Northern Ireland's richest people, was among four people killed when his helicopter crashed amid thick fog in eastern England, officials said on Friday. The cause was not immediately known.

The accident happened at around 7:30 p.m. local time on Thursday when a privately-owned Augusta Westland AW139 helicopter crashed off the A143 road in Gillingham, a small village in the southern part of Norfolk county. It was carrying four people, all of them male, including 70-year-old Ballyedmond. Investigators said the aircraft had taken off from nearby Gillingham Hall, a stately home owned by Ballyedmond, just before Thursday's accident. "The crash site is in a field containing some wooded area and all four occupants on board the helicopter were pronounced dead at the scene," Norfolk Constabulary said in a statement. Emergency services responded to the area after receiving a call at about 7:30 p.m. from someone who reported hearing the noise of a "loud crash," after which a crash site was discovered. Debris from the crash was also found on nearby roads, leading to road closures in the area. "On behalf of the force I would like to pass on my condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of those who have sadly lost their lives in this tragic incident," said Chief Superintendent Bob Scully. "Police, along with our emergency service colleagues have been working through the night to secure the scene." It was not immediately known what may have caused the deadly crash, but residents in the area reported thick fog at the time of the accident. Veterinary pharmaceuticals company Norbrook confirmed its founding Chairman and CEO, Lord Ballyedmond, was one of the four victims. The other three victims were identified as site foreman Declan Small and the two crewmembers, Captain Carl Dickerson and Captain Lee Hoyle. "Our thoughts are with the immediate families and friends of the deceased who have requested privacy at this difficult time," the company said in a statement. "We take enormous pride in our Chairman's extraordinary legacy in establishing Norbrook as a global veterinary and pharmaceutical industry leader." The statement added: "Management will continue to advance his pioneering vision with a renewed vigor and determination befitting his memory." According to last year's "Rich List" in the Sunday Times, Ballyedmond's wealth was estimated to be approximately £860 million (\$1.4 billion), making him one of the wealthiest people in Northern Ireland. The businessman, a Conservative peer in the House of Lords, is survived by his wife and their three children.

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