

Beat: Health

6 feared dead in fall at Mt. Rainier in Washington state

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USPA News - Six climbers are believed to have been killed in a steep fall at Mount Rainier in the U.S. state of Washington, making it the single worst accident at the 14,411 feet (4,392 meters)-high mountain in more than 30 years, the National Park Service (NPS) said on Saturday. The accident is believed to have happened between Wednesday night and Friday afternoon, when the group was reported missing after they failed to return to the trailhead as was expected.

The party, consisting of two skilled climbing guides and four clients, had begun their climb on Monday. After the group was reported missing at 4:30 p.m. local time on Friday, a ground search was conducted by a team of three Mount Rainier National Park climbing rangers, covering the Liberty Ridge route and the Bergschrund. The U.S. Army Reserve 214th Air Division and Northwest Helicopters later also joined the search. During Saturday's search for the climbers, searchers located climbing gear and detected signals from avalanche beacons at the top of Carbon Glacier at a height of about 9,500 feet (2,895 meters), said Mount Rainier National Park spokeswoman Patti Wold. She said it appeared the climbers had fallen from their last known location, which is about 3,300 feet (1,005 meters) from where the climbing gear was found. "All indications point toward a fall of 3,300 feet (1,005 meters) from near the party's last known location at 12,800 feet (3,901 meters) on Liberty Ridge," Wold said. "There is no viable chance of survival from such a fall. The Liberty Ridge route is one of the more technical and advanced routes on the mountain." Wold said there were no plans to put people on the ground at the site of the accident because of continuous rock and ice fall. "In the weeks and months to come the site will be checked periodically by aircraft. As snow melts and conditions change potential opportunities for a helicopter-based recovery will continue to be evaluated," she said, adding that there is no certainty that recovery will ever be possible. The group of climbers began their climb on Monday and were due to return on Friday. Seattle-based Alpine Ascents International, which organizes guided mountain expeditions, said it last spoke with their guides by satellite phone at about 6 p.m. local time on Wednesday, when the party was at an elevation of 12,800 feet (3,901 meters) with plans to overnight at the location. "This accident represents a horrific loss for our guide partners and the families and loved ones of every one of the climbers lost on the mountain," said Mount Rainier National Park Superintendent Randy King. "The climbing community is a small one and a close one and a loss of this magnitude touches many. Our thoughts are with everyone affected by this tragic accident." The accident is the single worst loss of life at Mount Rainier since 11 climbers were killed in an ice avalanche on the mountain's Ingraham Glacier in June 1981. More recently, three climbers died of hypothermia near the top of the Paradise Glacier on Mount Rainier, though only two of the bodies have been recovered so far.

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