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Country Music Artist and Regular to USVI, Kenny Chesney, Mourns Death of Pilot in St. Thomas Helicopter Crash

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Kenney Chesney and Maria Rodriguez. Mr. Chesney shared pictures of his friend in a tribute to her on Facebook Monday evening that has so far garnered over 5,000 shares and 304,000 reactions. By. KENNY CHESNEY VIA FACEBOOK

Country music star and regular visitor to the U.S. Virgin Islands, Kenny Chesney, in a post on Facebook Monday evening said he was saddened by the death of Maria Rodriguez, the pilot of the helicopter that went down Monday afternoon in Botany Bay on St. Thomas.

Mr. Chesney, 52, has a home on St. John and spends a considerable amount of time on the island. "Today I have to say a very hard goodbye to my friend Maria Rodriguez in the Virgin Islands.

Maria and others were killed today in a helicopter crash in St. Thomas. She was a dear friend to me and to our island community. I have been flying with Maria for over 15 years and we shared a lot of laughs and a lot of life together," Mr. Chesney [wrote on Facebook Monday](#).

He added, "She was always the first person I saw when I landed and the last person I said goodbye to when I would leave island. I'm sure going to miss that. It's fair to say I won't ever be able to go to the Virgin Islands again without feeling the loss of her. She was such a huge part of my island life.

"So goodbye sweet friend. I'm sure glad our paths crossed on this side. See you on the other."

The helicopter crashed at Botany Bay Monday afternoon and left at least four individuals dead, the Consortium can confirm.

A Consortium reporter as of 6:32 p.m. Monday was in the vicinity of the scene of the accident, however emergency personnel had cordoned off a broad area.

The Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) said in a release issued at about 6:24 p.m. Monday that a number of local emergency responders were on the scene, including VITEMA, VI Fire Service, VI Port Authority and the V.I. Police Department. VITEMA said the incident occurred at roughly 3:00 p.m.

The federal government also had personnel on the scene, including the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and National Transportation Safety Board. St. Thomas Rescue was on site as well.

According to a person with knowledge of the matter, at least four people were on the helicopter, including a St. Thomas business owner, his wife and son. VITEMA at about 7:36 p.m. subsequently confirmed in a second news release that four people were on the helicopter, all of whom succumbed to injuries sustained during the tragic incident. According to the person, first responders are set continue their search and rescue efforts early Tuesday, as visibility diminished Monday night. The helicopter is said to have been completely destroyed during the crash, said the person.

VITEMA said identification of victims would be withheld pending next of kin notification.

See below for pictures and a video.



Fire personnel leaving scene of accident. (Kyle Murphy for VI Consortium)



First responders near scene of helicopter crash (Kyle Murphy for VI Consortium)

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