



# Rapid Lesson Sharing

Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation

Liberty Fire Suppression Repair

2 October 2017

## What Happened

On October 1 near the end of shift, the Task Force Leader (TFLD) and an Excavator Operator scouted a steep section of dozer line that needed repair. After evaluating the line, the Operator said he could complete the line working upslope. They also identified the point where the Operator would stop, turn around, and begin walking the excavator back down the slope. The plan was agreed upon between the TFLD and Operator to start work on this scouted section of line in the morning.

Overnight, the area received an inch of snow. On October 2 after briefing crews on the operations for the day, the TFLD approached the Safety Officer Trainee [SOFR(T)] and advised him that the Excavator Operator was enroute to work the steep section of dozer line. Knowing he was limited on Heavy Equipment Bosses (HEQB) to supervise the Operator, the TFLD asked the SOFR(T) to keep an eye on the Operator while the TFLD lined-out his other resources.

The excavator worked the dozer line successfully. However, while making his way back down the slope, he lost traction and started to slide. The Operator attempted to stop the slide by setting his boom on the ground—but forward momentum carried him over his bucket and the thumb of his bucket got stuck under the excavator blade. This resulted in the machine tipping over on its side and trapping the operator inside the cab. The operator radioed the TFLD. The SOFR(T) answered the call and provided a radio relay. The Operator stated that he had tipped over the excavator and was trapped inside the cab—but was unharmed. While the SOFR(T) was relaying information on the radio, the Operator removed the back window of the excavator and carried it up the steep slope to the road where the SOFR(T) was parked. The ICT3, EMT, and the SOFR traveled to the incident where the EMT checked on the Operator and determined he was unharmed and did not need any additional evaluations. The IC took a tactical pause with all operations while they developed a plan to rescue the tipped over machinery using another excavator. They successfully had the excavator upright and back on its tracks by mid-afternoon.

*See Photos  
of this Excavator Tip Over  
on Page 2*

## Lessons

### What was done well:

- Gaps in supervision were identified and mitigated.
- Multiple resources had good situational awareness and were ready to respond if needed.
- Operational tempo was immediately adjusted and Leader's Intent was clearly identified.

### Contributing Factors:

- Placement of dozer line in steep treacherous terrain made repair work challenging, increasing risk to operators.
- Deficient in qualified HEQB available for shoulder season work.
- Inclement weather made operations challenging.

### Recommendations:

- Reevaluate tactics after changes in weather and site conditions.
- Provide more HEQB classes and trainee opportunities.
- Generate a contingency plan for egress before engaging resources.





**Submitted By**  
DNRC Southwestern Land Office