

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Saddle Mountain Medical Extraction

Date: June 10, 2016

Location: Coconino National Forest, Arizona



The two hotshot crews clear a wide, navigable path down the hillside for extraction using a low-angle rope rescue.

NARRATIVE

On Friday June 10th, two interagency hotshot crews were dispatched to assist with a medical emergency. A U.S. Forest Service employee had a tibia-fibula break and was located near the top of a steep hillside.

Initially, a helicopter extraction was ordered. After the initial size-up, the helicopter departed to reconfigure for short-haul. However, once the situation was assessed by the first hotshot crew on scene, it was determined that a low-angle rope rescue operation could be used for extraction.

Due to the area's snag hazards, steep slopes and thick vegetation—and because of the short distance to a nearby road—the short-haul ship was cancelled.

In the meantime, the two hotshot crews worked to clear a wide, navigable path down the hillside for the extraction.

Once the patient was assessed by a private emergency medical service, her injury was splinted and she was made comfortable and packaged into a Traverse Rescue Stretcher (TRS).



The patient was placed in this Traverse Rescue Stretcher.

Two low-angle rope rescue systems were set up to facilitate a smooth one-third of a mile extraction down the mountain. From the moment the team began the descent to the time the patient was placed into the ambulance was less than one hour.



One of the many successes of this medical extraction incident was how the two hotshot crews worked together toward completing the mission of a safe and quick patient extraction.

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SUCCESSSES

- ✓ Coordination between the two hotshot crews—who were from different Regions and agencies—was fluid. Integration between the two crews occurred where needed. Technical work such as setting up anchors and the lowering system were handled inter-crew as practiced in preseason training. The immediate needs of the patient were assessed and acted upon through these two crews working together to complete the mission of a safe and quick patient extraction.
- ✓ The phone calls on the drive out to the incident helped with the coordination to determine what each crew was carrying for medical equipment and setting up a pre-plan upon arrival regarding incident roles.
- ✓ In summary, one of the many successes of this medical extraction was how these two hotshot crews focused on the mission and respected input from others regardless of the color of their hard hats.

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- ✓ Equipment familiarity in the off-season facilitated speed in packaging the patient. This included training that was integrated into both hotshot crews' seasonal preparations. Similar low-angle rope rescue operation (LARRO) equipment setups were utilized by both crews. This training allowed personnel to quickly adapt to the equipment on hand without having any onsite training.
- ✓ Preseason training with simulated scenarios helped to identify possible problems that were mitigated in advance of this rescue. One crew determined the standard width of the extraction route was not enough and was able to convey that information. A wider path was cut starting at the patient's location, allowing the litter team to decide which direction was best for the patient's safety and comfort as well as minimizing their fatigue.
- ✓ Awareness of the patient's needs and comfort was a priority. The teams adjusted their saw cut work for the patient's benefit, as well as providing her with a more comfortable helmet.
- ✓ Everyone used the same frequencies for communications. This allowed for an early assessment from incoming resources by those already on scene, including the helicopter and private emergency service. Also, the Dispatch Center was kept in the loop through on-the-ground communications, such as a hasty assessment.
- ✓ The number (40+) of responders on scene sped up the response time.

- ✓ A simple lowering system was utilized based on terrain, snags in the area, and other vegetation. Selecting the right equipment for the job, as well as being prepared, was crucial in minimizing the time to get the patient down.
- ✓ Scouting for a contingency plan continued despite the efforts toward the primary plan of extraction.
- ✓ Communication of skillsets prior to the incident allowed Dispatch to send trained personnel to assist. Communication between the hotshot crews and the private emergency responder made everyone more confident in allowing the hotshot crews to focus on the extraction process, while the emergency responders focused on the patient.

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- ✓ Communication was solid between responders and the patient. This allowed the patient to be more at ease with her situation. Responders recognized her discomfort and mitigated the situation as best as possible.
- ✓ The local Forest Service battalion chiefs were on scene coordinating with Dispatch via cell phone, deferring all on-the-ground rescue operations to the hotshot crews because of their expertise using LARRO equipment.

CHALLENGES

- ✓ The IHCs were not aware of an official IC. However, in this situation it did not hinder operations because the two crews worked together efficiently. Both hotshot superintendents coordinated the actions of rescue personnel together.
- ✓ Many communications were transmitted via cell phones rather than over the radio.
- ✓ Incoming personnel were not aware of the medical qualification level of the emergency responder. Therefore, it became difficult for them to assess the accuracy of the initial patient assessment.
- ✓ A stokes litter was taken to the top. However, the wheel that was brought with it was ineffective in this terrain. One crew had extensive experience in Search and Rescue operations due to their partnership with rescue operations in their home unit. Having a Russ Anderson wheel for the stokes litter would have expedited the extraction process.

**This RLS was submitted by:
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