

**USDA Forest Service
Rocky Mountain Region**

San Juan Public Lands, Columbine Ranger District

Jones Creek ATV Rollover Facilitative Learning Analysis

"Even though the ATV is a total loss the outcome of the incident is a positive one due to the fact that no employees were injured"



August 16th, 2011

"Thankfully no employees were injured, now we need to see what we can learn from this event and communicate it to others"

Description of events

Summary-On Friday August 16, 2011 at approximately 1400 hours two persons were driving ATV's up the Jones Creek Trail North East of Lower Hermosa Camp Ground. They began driving through a narrow switchback along the trail when the first ATV's right front tire nudged a rock on the right side of the trail causing the ATV to slide to the left of the trail and the edge to give way. The ATV then proceeded to roll down a steep drainage approximately 80 feet. The operator was able to jump off of the ATV as it began to roll. No individuals were injured in this incident.



Narrative-Two individuals were assigned to check a fire that had been placed into monitor status a week earlier. The original trail which was used to access the fire was the Mitchell Lake Trail, this trail was identified early on to not be safe to ride on an ATV and has had a history of ATV accidents. The two individuals decided to use a different route (Jones Creek Trail) which was thought to be a safer route, but the trail had not yet been scouted. At 1300 hours the two individuals proceeded to ride ATV's up Jones Creek Trail, when they arrived at a somewhat narrow switch back approximately 3 miles up the trail. As is common in fire management, resources frequently scout control lines, roads, trails etc, in advance of committing to travel or use of these said paths. As the ATV operators neared this difficult section of trail this practice was utilized to access the relative risk. At 1400 hours the operators felt that they could safely navigate the section of trail and proceeded up the switchback on their ATV's, while traversing the switchback the right front tire of the lead ATV bumped a rock sticking out the side of a hill pushing the ATV to the left where it began to slide off the trail and down a steep drainage. Due to training and experience the rider jumped off the right side of the ATV as it went over the edge and did not attempt to stop the rolling ATV as is common with novice riders. No one was injured in this incident, but the ATV sustained severe damage as it rolled down into the drainage. No equipment was being transported on the ATV and all of the operators were wearing full agency required and approved PPE.

"How we respond to those incidents sets the stage for developing a reporting and learning culture"

Continued

Narrative-After the accident had occurred, the operators took some time to assess the situation and calm their nerves. Realizing that the first ATV was not salvageable they concentrated their efforts on ensuring the safety of the second ATV. They were not able to back the ATV back down the trail safely and were apprehensive about driving the ATV thru the area that the first ATV had just rolled down, they decided to dig out the trail and make it wide enough to which point they could safely move the ATV thru the area to get to a point where they could turn it around and drive it back to the trailer. After the second ATV was turned around the IC proceeded to hike to a higher vantage point where he could acquire usable cell phone reception and contacted the district duty officer to notify him of what happen. The operators did not use a radio to contact anyone due to poor radio reception (due to location) and fear that the transmission may not be understood resulting in a undesired and unneeded emergency response. Because Dispatch was not notified immediately about the ATV that was left in the drainage, it was reported to the Dispatch center by a private citizen. Dispatch began to work the incident as a potential Search and Rescue or Law Enforcement incident until they were notified at a later time.



(Looking down to the ATV in the brush and the trail at the accident site)

Environmental Conditions-On this day the weather was fair, temperatures in the upper 80's, light winds out of the southwest and partly cloudy with scattered thunderstorms in the area. The location on the trail where the accident had happened had received very little if any precipitation. There was very little foot traffic on this trail, with the exception of two mountain bikers and two motor cyclist, they had seen no other individuals on this trail. The trail was made up of typical soil and dirt and was fairly easy riding. Yet at the switch back where the incident had occurred, the soil type changed to a gravel and shale rock type of material, which contributed to the ATV sliding off the trail due to its significant instability.

"I really appreciate the openness about this mishap. I really would like us to learn from this and help prevent this from happening again since this scenario could have turned out much worse"

Continued

Observations-The use of ATVs is a highly skilled task that exposes employees to risk of serious injury while performing tasks. Employee ATV training along with experience plays a major role in mishap prevention. The trail being used the day of the event was the first time this trail had been utilized for an ATV and presented unknown hazards. Employees used site specific tailgate safety review of situation to address the trail condition and make an informed judgment call to proceed with caution. Risk Management Assessment (RMA)/Job Hazard Analysis' (JHA) cannot fully address potential risks and mitigating measures for field related tasks that are site specific.

Recommendations-

- 1-**Review the Trail Management Objective (TMO) for a trail that has not been utilized for operating an ATV before – the trail must be wide enough for safe ATV operation
- 2-** It is not recommended to take an ATV on a motorcycle trail.
- 3-**Operators should always know the width of the ATV they are operating.
- 4-**During planning and preparation of field work – reviewing RMA- consider and discuss the worst case scenario. An open discussion/conversation of site specific hazards can further identify potential risks.
- 5-**Evaluate terrain/trail for conditions that influence how you may have to operate the ATV.
- 6-**Not recommended to ride with wheels on uphill slope – putting the ATV off balance
- 7-**Look for an alternate way to get the job done; continuously re-evaluate all hazards.
- 8-**Ensure Notification of Dispatch as soon as possible.

Closing Thoughts-All persons involved in the incident were qualified and trained for the mission. Even though the ATV is a total loss the outcome of the incident is a positive one due to the fact that no employees were injured. Because of proper training and experience the individuals applied proper risk management and assessed the situation prior to committing to the narrow section of trail. This incident highlights that even with proper training, safety measures, risk management, and hazard mitigation accidents can still occur and how we respond to those incidents sets the stage for developing a reporting and learning culture.

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