



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Washington
Office

14th and Independence Ave. SW.
P.O. Box 96090
Washington, DC 20090-6090

File code: 6730

Date: September 5, 2003

Route to:

Subject: Expanded (72-Hour) Briefing

Location of accident: Incident occurred approximately 9 miles north of Imnaha, Oregon on county road 735 (Dug Bar Road) bordering the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest (T27N, R04W, Section 9, NE1/4, E1/2).

Date of accident: August 28, 2003

To: Chief

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS PRELIMINARY AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Name of injured:

Preliminary factual findings:

- The Pacific Northwest contract 20-person crew, StrikeBack #2 had been on-shift for 12.45 hours (0630 – 1915) at the time of the accident.
- The crew had been on the Lightning Complex from August 21 through 28, 2003 (eight days).
- From August 21 until the time of the accident on August 28, the crew was in full compliance of the Work/Rest and travel/driving requirements/limitations as per Interagency Firefighting Crew Agreement.
- All Strike Team Leaders, Division Group Supervisors, Branch Directors, and the Operation Section Chief that provided direct and indirect supervision to the Strike Back #2 crew were in compliance with the Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations 2003 handbook work/rest guidelines.
- Pre-Use Vehicle/Heavy Equipment Safety Inspection Checklist (Optional Form 296) was completed for four StrikeBack pickups (two inspected on August 21 and two on August 22). All four vehicles including the StrikeBack pickup, which was involved in the accident on August 28, passed the Pre-Use Inspection.
- Vehicle involved in the accident was a Ford F-350 pickup (miles at time of pre-use inspection was 48,599 miles).
- Crew effectively called for emergency help following the established emergency procedures. The procedures were in place and worked as planned.
- Wallowa County Sheriff was requested by the Blue Mountain Interagency Type II Team (Security Unit Leader) to provide road patrols to enforce driving issues, and to inform the Incident Commander of any citations written for speeding. Some of these issues included controlling the speed, erratic driving, seat belts, and closing roads to the public on the Lightning Complex.
- The Sheriff's Department wrote three warnings to other personnel on the fire and gave several verbal warnings prior the accident on August 28.
- The security Unit Leader specially addressed the No Tolerance Policy of the Blue Mountain Team for the above issues related to driving on the incident.
- Prior to August 28, a Pacific Northwest contract 20-person crew was released from the incident (the Crew Boss was driving the crew vehicle without a valid drivers license).
- The Wallowa-Whitman N. F. has a standing patrol agreement with the Wallowa County Sheriff's Department, which was used by the Team to facilitate police presence on the road systems.

Narrative: On August 28, 2003 at approximately 1915, five individuals from the Pacific Northwest contract twenty-person crew, StrikeBack # 2 were injured when their Ford F-350 crew cab pickup rolled. Strike Back # 2 was working on the Lightning Complex (Haas Ridge Fire) on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest with the Blue Mountain Interagency Type II Fire Team. The crew had been released from the Lightning Spike Camp to travel to the Lightning Complex Incident Command Post located in Joseph, Oregon to be demobed the following morning. The crew had traveled approximately 10 miles from the Lightning Spike Camp when for unknown reason the vehicle left the Dug Bar (County Road 735) and rolled approximately 300' down a steep slope. The pickup that was involved in the accident was the last in a group of four vehicles carrying firefighters employed by StrikeBack/Don Moss Enterprises, based in Dayville.

Two crewmembers were transported by National Guard helicopter to Sacred Heart Hospital in Spokane, Washington and three were transported by ambulance to Wallowa Memorial Hospital in Enterprise, Oregon. Due to the severity of the situation and urgent need for medical attention, the Operations and Medical personnel made the decision to launch the National Guard helicopter (night flight operations capable) that was assigned to the incident.

On the morning of August 29, one member was listed as critical/unstable and the second member was listed as serious condition. By September 1, both crewmembers that were flown to Sacred Heart Hospital in Spokane were classified as being in stable condition.

Of the three crewmembers that were transported to Wallowa Memorial Hospital in Enterprise, one crewmember was treated and released Thursday night. Two crewmembers were released Friday, September 29.

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing was offered to the StrikeBack #2 crew and all other individuals directly and indirectly associated with the incident. All members of the StrikeBack #2 crew that were not currently in the hospital attended the CISD session(s) including a number of other individuals from the Lightning Complex.

StrikeBack #2 crew worked on the Grouse Creek, Two Corral, and Haas Ridge Fires. The crew had been on the latter fire for four operational periods.

This incident is being investigated by the Wallowa County Sheriff's Office. A USDA Forest Service LEO is assisting the Sheriff's Office. According to Wallowa County Sheriff; although two of the men were ejected from the vehicle, all occupants were thought to have been wearing seat belts. However the pickup was damaged too badly to determine that conclusively, Sheriff stated.

/s/ Team leader

cc:
Safety Manager (at the level authorizing the investigation)



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