

# Rapid Lesson Sharing

**Event Type:** UTV Rollover

**Date:** Oct. 11, 2016

**Location:** Mingus Mountain, Arizona

## NARRATIVE

*When is it just a “normal” scouting mission?*

*It’s a nice day, good weather, drivable terrain. You’re checking already established fire lines and terrain strategies for an upcoming prescribed burn.*

*Accidents can happen in the blink of an eye. Even if “you’ve been there—done that” and are an experienced operator.*

*Driving a UTV cross-country and on unmaintained access roads can be unpredictable.*

### **UTV: Right Tool for the Job**

While conducting a Risk Assessment and determining the best tool for the job, reducing the risk to the individual, minimizing the exposure, in this case, choosing an UTV was the right tool. The UTV in this near miss was a John Deere with the 4X4 engaged. This UTV has an installed Rollover Protection Structure (ROPS) and seat belt for protection of the operator. The operator was wearing all required PPE.

### **What Happens Next . . .**

As the day progressed, the UTV operator was driving along the planned RX burn block. The operator came to a dry earthen “water tank” and was proceeding to access the area around the end of the tank. The far end of the tank was flatter and offered the least slope for access and egress.

The operator ascended over the top tank and was descending down the far bank at a slow, controlled speed. As the UTV descended down the earthen bank, the right front steering drive wheels grabbed the ground really hard.

*“The steering wheel was ripped from my hand, turning the UTV sharply into the bank,” the operator explained. The operator tried to maintain control and quickly stopped the UTV—but it was too late. The UTV came to a quick stop and was precariously leaning with the driver’s side on the down-slope side of the incline.*



***“The UTV just seemed to lean over and hang there for about five seconds.”***

### **UTV Operator**

---

*“The UTV just seemed to lean over and hang there for about five seconds,”* the operator said. This gave the operator an opportunity to unhook his seat belt and try to walk away—but at the same time, the UTV started a slow roll onto the driver’s side.

#### **Roll Cage Prevents UTV from Flipping Over and Trapping Operator**

The driver hunched down as the ROPS (roll cage) slowly came over him and the UTV came to an immediate stop. The operator was hunched over within the ROPS framing and simply walked through the ROPS enclosure to safety. The ROPS prevented the UTV from flipping completely over and trapping the operator.

The operator quickly realized that he would not be able to roll the UTV back over onto all four tires. He requested assistance from other firefighters in the area assisting with the RX planning. The UTV was quickly rolled back over and restarted. It only had minor damage to its plastic sun cover.

After the incident, an AAR was quickly conducted and all members resumed planning of the upcoming RX.

---

### **LESSONS**

- ✓ Review JHAs and Risk Assessments for operations of ATV/UTVs. This was covered in the morning briefing and all operators were attentive.
  - ✓ Know the machine you are operating, its characteristics and its quirks.
  - ✓ Maintain focus on the task at hand.
  - ✓ Play the “What If” game for potential hazards and what you can do to avoid or mitigate.
  - ✓ Have an exit strategy in the event an improbable situation takes place.
  - ✓ When purchasing new ATV/UTV equipment, specify power steering. Experience tells us that power steering can significantly lessen the erratic and unintended pitching or movement of an ATV/UTV.
  - ✓ Trainings for ATV/UTV should provide more emphasis on the challenges associated with no power steering and how these machines will react when encountering obstacles or transitional slopes.
- 

**This RLS was submitted by:**

**Safety Manager**

Do you have a Rapid Lesson to share?

Click this button:

[Share  
Your Lessons](#)