

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Smokejumper Injury,
Medical Evacuation

Date: August 2, 2015

Location: Umpqua National Forest



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NARRATIVE

At approximately 1050, a Boise BLM smokejumper was injured on a fire jump on the Watson Butte Fire on the Umpqua National Forest. (At the time, the Boise BLM smokejumpers were operating out of a spike base in Burns, Ore.)

The injured jumper was the second man in the third stick. Both jumpers had similar approaches which set them up to land in the same general area.

The first jumper landed with no issues and proceeded to remove his jump gear from a seated position. As the second jumper came in for his landing he was lined up to land behind his jump partner.

The second jumper hit the ground hard 5-7 feet behind the seated jumper and went into a right side roll. Strong momentum carried the jumper forward. In the process of rolling, he ran into his jump partner. This collision was described as being “just like a football hit”—the right side of his helmet and right shoulder smashed into the other jumper’s back.

Injury Involves Head and Neck

The injured jumper (2nd in the stick) knew immediately he was not OK. He had a weird sensation in his right arm as he hit and had also heard a pop.





He relayed that he was not OK. A nearby EMT-qualified jumper who had witnessed everything ran to his side, as did others.

Knowing the mechanism of injury involved the head and neck, the EMT was cautious and maintained C-spine immobilization. They cut off the patient's jump gear and conducted a thorough assessment.

The patient thought his arm was broken because of the weird sensation he had experienced, but the palpations did not reveal any abnormalities in the arm. His upper right shoulder area did have some tenderness. Because of what he had witnessed, the

EMT was very concerned about a spinal injury. Everyone knew something was not right.

The Life Flight medics told the injured smokejumper in flight they were thoroughly impressed with the level of his care and packaging.

Patient Packaged in Traverse Rescue Stretcher

The jump spot manager immediately let the jump plane know there was an injured jumper and requested the trauma kit. The patient was evaluated and packaged in a Traverse Rescue Stretcher (TRS) in less than 15 minutes. Because of the concern about spinal injury based on the mechanism of injury, immediate aerial extraction was requested—relayed to Dispatch through the jumper aircraft.

Jumpers got to work on improving a landing area for a helicopter. Air attack was inbound to the fire already and made contact with the jumpers on the ground who informed him of their situation. The jumper aircraft, low on fuel, left the scene.

Life Flight Arrives 45 Minutes After Injury

The patient was moved to the landing zone. Life Flight had been activated by Dispatch and arrived on scene approximately 45 minutes after the initial injury. The Life Flight medics told the injured smokejumper in flight they were thoroughly impressed with the level of his care and packaging.

The injured jumper was delivered directly to St. Charles Hospital in Bend, Ore. The time from injury to hospital was just under two hours. He was treated for stable lateral fractures of the C-6 and C-7 vertebrae.

This generic picture that shows C-6 and C-7 is not the patient's actual X-ray.



LESSONS

If you have people drive, you're going to have driving accidents. If you have folks use chainsaws, you're going to have chainsaw accidents. If you have people fly parachutes, you're going to have parachute accidents. We constantly prove this in the Wildland Fire Service.

What can we all take away from this event?

Train, Train, Train

The response in this incident was handled with precision. It's clear the Boise Smokejumpers know exactly how to respond to medical incidents. They do extensive emergency medical training with all of their staff, not just EMTs. They understand and accept the risk they are taking—and plan accordingly.

Other programs can emulate this perspective and make preparing for emergency medical response to injured employees a regular part of their program. Consider the people you work with. They are most likely going to be the ones to respond when you get hurt. Are they trained to the level YOU want?

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Have a Medical Program

The Boise smokejumpers have protocols determined by a medical director who oversees their EMS program. They also have a designated EMT coordinator who oversees their initial medical training (WFR and EMT-B) and continuing education. As part of their annual fire refresher training, they simulate medical scenarios. These scenarios allow them to become familiar with their medical equipment, protocols, and to practice their skills. What does your program need? How will you get it there?

Don't Plan on Talking to a Non-Agency Helicopter

On this incident, personnel on the ground attempted to contact the incoming Life Flight helicopter on a pre-designated frequency but were unable to do so. In this particular instance, Air Attack was able to communicate with Life Flight and things went smoothly. If you are expecting a non-agency medical helicopter on your fire, do not expect to be able to talk to them on the radio—and plan accordingly.

This may consist of over-marking your helispot to make it as noticeable as possible, or relaying pertinent information through dispatch (long game of telephone, so do it early!).

Maybe order Air Attack when you request the helicopter. If you are able to talk with the incoming helicopter, fantastic. If you can't, at least you're prepared and not surprised.

Hospital Liaison

The Boise Smokejumpers are prepared for hospital visits. They always send a hospital liaison. This is a crucial position and bad things can happen if you don't have one. The Boise Smokejumpers even have a handy list of responsibilities to reference. Do you? (Make one!)

Smokejumper Learning Culture/System (Reporting, Sharing, Tracking)

In a way, Rapid Lesson Sharing is trying to be what the smokejumper community has had for quite some time.

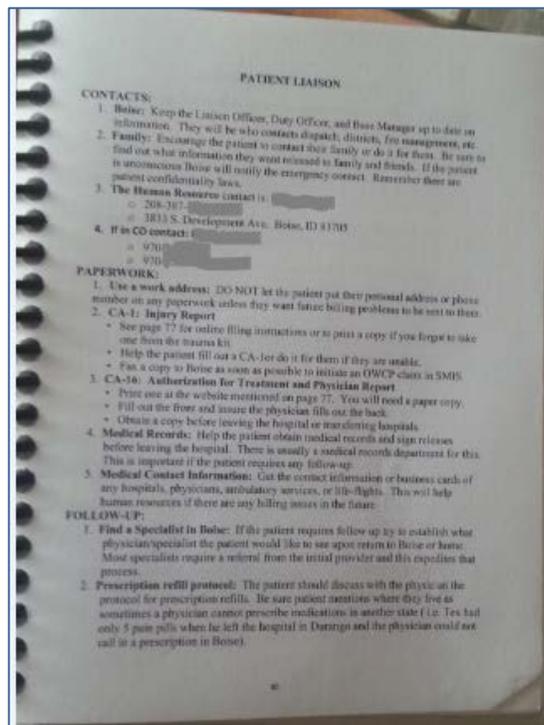
If an incident occurs under canopy with any smokejumper, BLM or Forest Service, a Mission Incident Worksheet describing the event is filled out and immediately sent out to Smokejumper Base Managers. This generally happens within 24 hours of the event.

Additionally there is a Smokejumper Parachute Landing Injury Data System which is kept up by Missoula Technology and Development Center (MTDC). These reports are collected to track historic injury data/trends.

The form has a description of the incident, a jumper narrative, a spotter narrative, and a "conclusions / corrective actions" section.

Many jumper-specific lessons are rapidly identified and shared using these tools. The reports collected by MTDC are used to support programmatic learning.

Support the broader system of learning. Share YOUR lessons with everyone in the wildland fire service.



Patient Liaison reminder sheet.

This RLS Reviewed by the Firefighters Involved

Do you have a Rapid Lesson to share?
Click this button:

Share
Your Lessons