

Event Type: Transport Fire

Date: July 26, 2023

Location: Hill County, TX



Report Summary

On Wednesday, July 26th, 2023, the Texas A&M Forest Service responded to a wildland fire in Hill County. While working to contain the Blum Fire, a dozer transport parked in the “black.” Shortly after unloading the dozer, the transport unit caught fire.

An RLS team was requested to review the event. The key lessons learned from those involved in the incident and the RLS team are shared in this report.



Narrative

The Texas A&M Forest Service (TAMFS) was requested for assistance on the Blum Fire, located in Hill County, approximately one hour north of the nearest TAMFS Task Force office. Responding resources from the local Task Force office included two engines, two tractor plow units on bobtail transports, and two dozer units on combination “lowboy” trailers. Resources arrived on scene at 1607.

At 1630, a parking area for the Heavy Equipment Boss Trainee HEQB(T) driving a pickup with a UTV trailer and one of the responding dozer units was identified. Considering the observed fire behavior, heavy fuel loading, and equipment access, options for viable areas to unload were limited. This



parking area, a large clearing in the black, appeared to have little to no re-burn potential. The ground was solid and level enough to disconnect the trailer and unload the dozer.

After parking, the HEQB(T) began unloading the UTV, and the dozer operator began the process of unloading the dozer. This multi-step process involves lowering and “breaking the neck” of the trailer, which separates it from the deck of the trailer. The truck must then pull forward far enough to allow space for the dozer to come off the front of the trailer. Once the operator unloaded the dozer, the truck was not reconnected to the trailer.

The operator then moved the dozer across the gravel road to brief with the HEQB(T) before engaging in line construction. During their briefing, the operator noticed that the transport was on fire.

“I heard a pop and a hiss, and went over to check the transport “



The operator realized that the fire was on the passenger side of the transport, and was starting to burn in the engine compartment. The HEQB(T) notified the Incident Commander via radio and requested engine support. The operator quickly flagged down an engine driving by. However, by the time suppression efforts were established, the engine compartment and cab of the transport were fully involved.

Post-Incident

After the transport fire was extinguished, it was identified that the front passenger tire was parked on a small tree limb buried in a shallow mound of juniper needle duff.

The operator took a tactical pause, regrouped, and determined that the best course of action was to proceed with line construction in the dozer.

Lessons Learned

Incident Within an Incident (IWI)

Any event that takes away from normal suppression operations can be run as an IWI. Although this event was not addressed as such, what are some of the advantages of handling an unexpected event as an IWI? Can the 8-line process be adjusted based on the nature of the incident to ensure all the proper information is recorded with time stamps?

Mental Checklists

Upon arriving on scene, there were reports of structures threatened, a power pole failing and arcing next to the identified parking spot, and a vehicle wreck. The highway was also blocked by a medical helicopter transporting a civilian that had a heart attack. Utilizing a systematic process such as a checklist not only improves productivity, but also helps us maintain consistency and create calm in a hectic environment.

- Do you have a mental checklist that is ingrained in your brain for tasks that must be completed in high stress environments?
- Is a complete walk-around a part of your checklist when you park in the black? Does this include the area where the transport pulls forward from the trailer in order to unload equipment?

Accessibility and size of fire extinguishers

The Fire extinguisher for the transport was mounted inside the cab.

- Do you have fire extinguishers that are readily available and adequately sized for the equipment they are on?

Positive Support from Supervision

Following events with a less than favorable outcome, we all process our emotions differently. The operator involved is known by their supervisor to be hard on themselves when they perceive that they have made a mistake. In this instance, the HEQB(T), as well as the operator's supervisor, kept a close eye on the operator after the event. They both felt that the operator was in a good mental state before asking them to start constructing fire line.

This RLS
was submitted by:

Danny Al-Batal
Dustin Morris
Brad Henry

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