

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: UXO Discovered on a Prescribed Fire

Date: June 29, 2023

Location: Pole Mountain Prescribed Fire
Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest
Wyoming

"After lifting the object about six inches off the ground, the fins of the UXO pulled out of the ground. At that time, we both realized what this object actually was."

The Story and Lessons from Discovering UXO on a Prescribed Fire

By
E-632 Engine Boss

Background

Engine 632 was assigned to the Pole Mountain Prescribed Fire on the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest from June 24 to June 30. The crew consisted of an Engine Boss (ENGB), a Firefighter Type 1 (FFT1), and three first year seasonals. Our crew was not organic to the Medicine Bow-Routt and had travelled from a neighboring Forest.

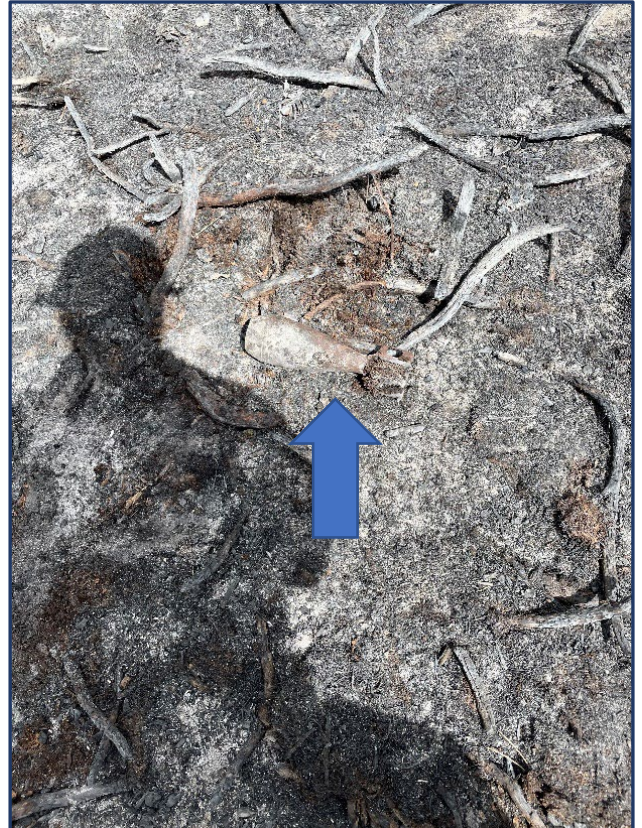
On Thursday, June 29, as part of the morning briefing, we discussed plans, assignments, and weather. All crews assigned to the Pole Mountain Rx had been thoroughly briefed that unexploded ordnance (UXO) was present in the Rx unit, which was the site of a former U.S. Army mortar range.

As part of the holding crew, we talked about UXO in greater detail and referenced the UXO section of the Incident Response Pocket Guide (IRPG) on page 25.

Throughout the assignment, burn operations were being successfully implemented. All ignition and holding objectives were met without incident. AARs had been conducted after all prior shifts.

The UXO Discovery

On June 29, after an initial morning briefing, the crew of the E-632 were split between two separate units. The Engine Boss and a first year seasonal were tasked with utilizing the engine for holding on a northern unit that was in monitor status. The FFT1 and two first year seasonals were tasked with assisting the Holding Boss on a southern unit. At approximately 1600, the FFT1 sent a text message to the ENGB stating that he had discovered UXO. The ENGB conferred by text message with the FFT1, stating that he needed to report the UXO to the Burn Boss.



The UXO after it was picked up by the crew member. Originally, it was laying partially submerged in the disturbed soil just above its current location. The fins at the rear of the object were covered-up in duff, giving the perception that it was just a piece of trash.

The following input is provided by the Holding Boss who was present at the discovery of the UXO:

“I was the Holding Boss for the Pole Mountain Rx. We were in monitor and patrol status. I had two Type 6 Engines with a compliment of crew members assigned to help with mop-up operations and line securement.

On June 29, at approximately 1500, one of the crew members offered to walk down a section of handline with me to ensure it would hold through the winds that evening, and throughout the night. We checked the line going down the unit.

When hiking back up, about 10-15 feet in the black (the burned-out area), the crew member’s right foot struck something in the ground. The object was about halfway submerged in ash and duff.

“What’s that?” he asked. Thinking it was trash—maybe an old bottle or can—he bent down and picked it up.

After lifting the object about six inches off the ground, the fins of the UXO pulled out of the ground. At that time, we both realized what this object actually was.

The crew member immediately set the object down and we both backed away. We both documented the incident by taking pictures of the object (see photo on previous page). I also took GPS coordinates of the UXO in Avenza maps.

We then proceeded to hike back up to the top of the hill where the Incident Commander for the entire Pole Mountain Rx units was waiting for us. We immediately told him what we had found. He then notified the District Ranger as well as the Central Zone FMO and the county sheriff's office.

I later helped guide the sheriff’s deputies to UXO’s location.

After inspection by the sheriff’s department, it was determined that the UXO was hollow—with no priming cap.”

Lessons

We had been briefed about the potential for UXO. We had worked five days without any signs or reports of UXO. Complacency, therefore, could have been a factor.

- ❖ Always remain vigilant when conducting operations in a UXO area. Each individual crew member should maintain a high level of situational awareness.
- ❖ Never assume that what might appear as trash is “just trash”—especially in an area where UXO may be a concern. Never pick up, disturb, or handle found items in a designated UXO area.
- ❖ When UXO is identified, document and secure the location and report to the proper authorities.
- ❖ Remain mindful of human factors. We take care of the places we work, which includes picking up trash. Have you ever picked up a piece of “trash” and not known what it was?
- ❖ [Review the Six Minutes for Safety UXO.](#)

**This RLS was submitted by:
E-632 Engine Boss**

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

[**Share
Your Lessons**](#)