

Flat Fire Accident Investigation

Dispatch

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U.S. Department of the Interior



Bureau of Land Management

September 17, 1997

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Office of Fire and Aviation
3833 South Development Avenue
Boise, Idaho 83705

October 15, 1997

In Reply Refer To:
9210 (FA-100) N

Information Bulletin OF&A No. 98- 003

To: All Field Officials
From: Director, Office of Fire and Aviation
Subject: Flat Fire Accident Investigation Report

Please find attached a report of the Flat Fire Accident Investigation. The accident occurred on July 15, 1997, in the BLM Richfield District five miles south of Monroe, Utah.

An investigation team was assembled, which consisted of six representatives from the Bureau of Land Management, USDA Forest Service and the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands. The team was assigned to investigate the accidental death of a private citizen who was overrun by wildland fire while trying to remove a camp trailer from private property.

Although the investigation of the accident itself was conducted by the Sevier County Sheriff's Office, the investigation team undertook the responsibility to determine if there were any actions by the suppression organization that contributed in any way to the accident. Additionally, they examined the record to see if there were any opportunities to prevent the accident.

The report concluded that the fire suppression actions did not contribute to the individual's death, and that in spite of the suppression organization's attempt to find and rescue the individual the extreme fire behavior prevented the opportunity for a successful rescue. What occurred was a tragic accident to an individual who was performing a gesture of kindness for his friend.

During the course of the fatality investigation, several findings were identified relevant to the management of the Flat Fire. Although these findings in no way contributed to the accidental

ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORT

Accident: Wildland Fire Burnover - One Fatality (Private Citizen)
Fire Name and Location: Flat Fire - Five Miles South of Monroe, Utah
Organizational Unit: Richfield District, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Date: July 15, 1997

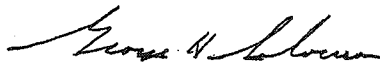
TEAM MEMBERS



Mike Green, Team Leader Representative
BLM District Manager - Oregon



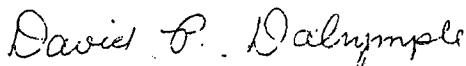
Mike Gilkerson, Chief Investigator
BLM Range Technician - Montana



George Solverson, Health and Safety
USFS Health and Safety - Oregon



Rodger Vorce, Technical Fire
BLM Office of Fire and Aviation - Idaho



Dave Dalrymple, Utah State Fire
Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands - Utah



Anne Stanworth, Public Affairs
BLM Public Affairs - Utah

Flat Fire Accident Investigation

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PREFACE

The tragic wildfire accident that occurred on July 15, 1997, which led to the death of Mike Larsen is unique because he, a private citizen, was killed while trying to remove a recreational trailer from private property. Mr. Larsen had no involvement in the suppression actions or in the support of such actions. His was purely a gesture of kindness by helping a friend remove an article from what was perceived to be in harm's way.

The Flat Fire Investigation Team looked at the accident from the perspective that the local authorities (in this instance the Sevier County Sheriff's Office) would be looking at the activities that led to the victim being overrun by the fire. Upon the team confirming the local authorities' investigative role, we accepted the responsibility to determine if any action(s) by the suppression organization contributed in any way to the accident or if anything could have been done by the organization that would have prevented the accident.

INCIDENT OVERVIEW

Background - July 15, 1997

Late in the afternoon, thunderstorms with localized dry lightning developed over the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Richfield District in central Utah (Map 1). Several local citizens reported two fires approximately 5 miles south of Monroe, Utah, in an area known as Poverty Flat (Map 2, Page 2). The fires were clearly visible from populated areas and towns to the north (Photo 1). Both the Sevier County 911 dispatch center and the Richfield Interagency Fire Center (RIFC) received reports of these fires starting at 1642 hours. Initial attack forces were promptly dispatched from the RIFC and by 1702 hours, the first engine from the Monroe Volunteer Fire Department arrived on the incident.

According to the Sevier County Sheriff's accident report, Don Gilchrist, after observing the fires from work in Richfield headed for the Live Oak Canyon area to retrieve his son's (James) dog, which had been left at their camp. Although the report does not say specifically, it is obvious from the interview that at no time

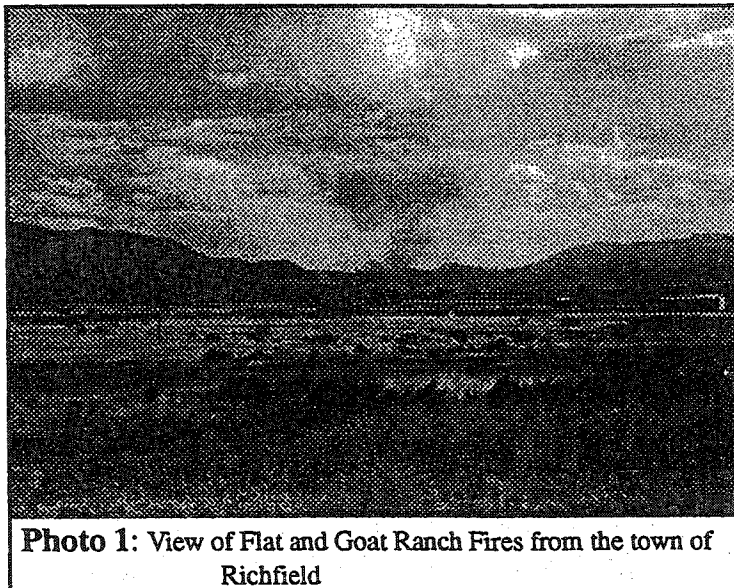
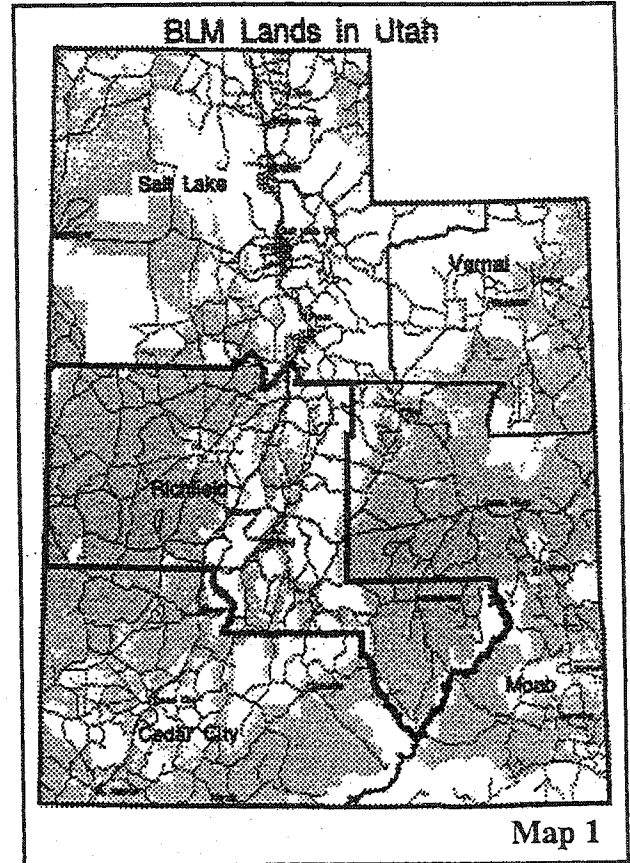
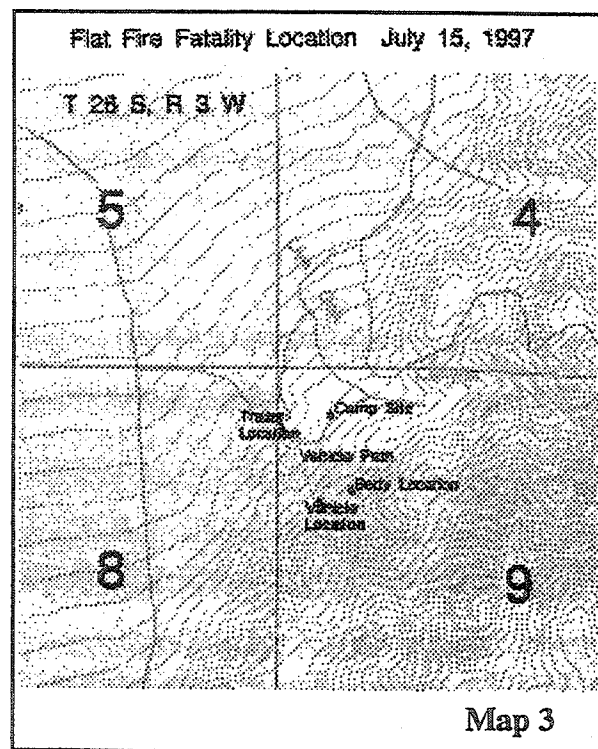
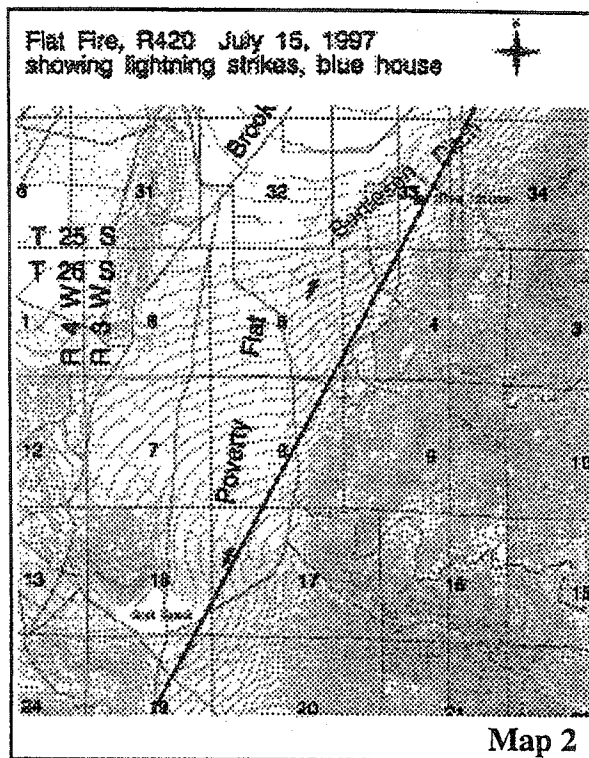


Photo 1: View of Flat and Goat Ranch Fires from the town of Richfield

while driving to the area did Mr. Gilchrist ever encounter any fire. His route to Live Oak Canyon took him east of the existing fire. When he got to the area he met Mr. Ellison. Mr. Ellison was in the area, heard the dog barking, and was bringing the animal out. Mr. Gilchrist, at this time, decided while he was in the area to look at the camp spot where his and his son's trailers were parked. On his way out, he met Mike Larsen whom he did not know but who knew him. Mr. Larsen told him that he was on his way to retrieve James' camp trailer before the fire got it. At this time Mr. Gilchrist estimated the fire was about one-half mile away.

INCIDENT OVERVIEW, CONTINUED



Consequently, he turned around and followed Mr. Larsen into the camp spot, Mr. Larsen hooked onto the trailer and started back out the road.

After going approximately two-tenths of a mile they observed fire moving across the road ahead about 50 feet away. According to Mr. Gilchrist, they decided to unhook the trailer and drive through the fire. Once the trailer was disconnected from Mr. Larsen's truck, Mr. Gilchrist went first through the fire and assumed Mr. Larsen was following. However, in looking in his rear-view mirror he noted that Mr. Larsen had turned around and headed back up the hill. This was the last time Mr. Larsen was seen alive.

1700 to 1800 - Initial Attack

The principal suppression resources and personnel working on the incident included Monroe Fire Chief Michael Mills with two structure engines, Engine Foreman Chris Colton with BLM Engine 5, Engine Foreman Tina Greenhalgh with State of Utah Engine 3A71, and Incident Commander (IC) Kelly Allen (Area Manager, State of Utah). Helicopter 99R was also dispatched.

During the initial size-up, it was determined that the fires were burning intensely, spreading rapidly across a large open sagebrush flat located below the sharply rising north/south Monroe Mountains. Fire whirls and 10 to 15-foot flame lengths were observed. The fires were influenced by erratic, gusting winds up to 40 miles per hour. The northernmost fire was spreading primarily to the south, southwest; the second fire, 2 miles to the south, was burning east and north (Photo 2, Page 3).

INCIDENT OVERVIEW, CONTINUED

Photo 2: Aerial view of the two fires looking North.

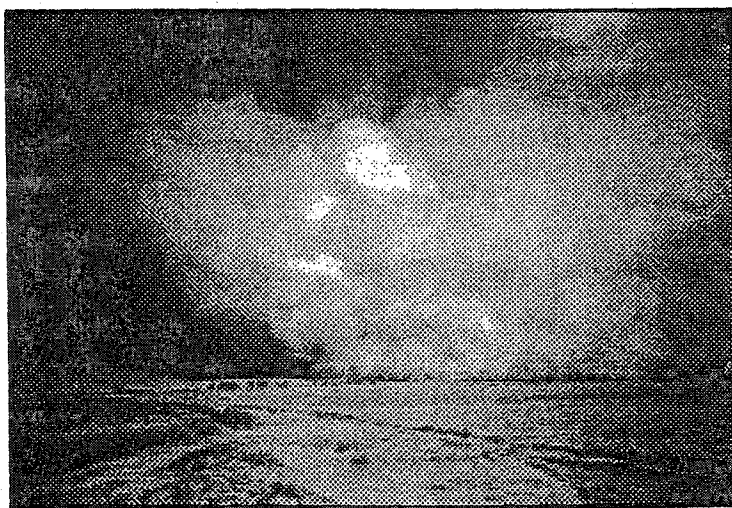
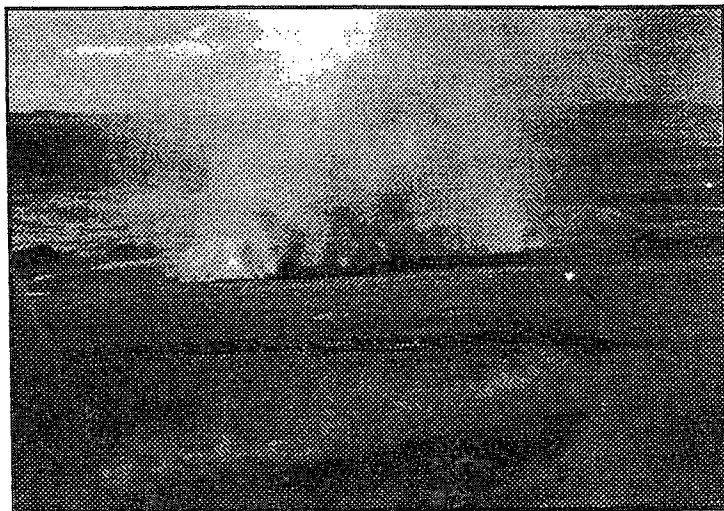


Photo 3: Peak fire activity rapidly expanding to the North.

INCIDENT OVERVIEW, CONTINUED

It was agreed that Engine 5 would take charge of the south fire with the primary objective of protecting a nearby camp trailer at "goat ranch" (Map 2, Page 2). Engine 3A71 and the Monroe engines would concentrate on the north end. Additional resources, including USFS Engine 841, BLM Engines 2 and 6, local law enforcement, and Richfield Fire Department were en route, or starting to arrive.

Concern was growing for fire fighter and public safety. The fires were spreading rapidly, growing in size (Photo 3, Page 3), and potentially threatening structures to the north. In addition, the risk to public safety increased as more and more bystanders in vehicles and on ATVs began congesting the roads. Utah Power Company personnel with heavy equipment were also discovered working in the fire area. All personnel on the incident, including Sevier County Sheriff's Deputy Charlie Ogden and Sergeant Kim Sorenson, were challenged and frustrated in their efforts to restrict access into the fire area.

1800 to 1830 - Fire Grows in Size

During this period, the fires continued to burn intensely. It was clear that they would soon burn together. The decision was made to treat both fires as one with Allen as the Incident Commander. Engine 5 successfully assisted several private individuals to evacuate a camp trailer. Engine 841 was engaged in structure protection operations involving a "blue house" located at the northeast end of the flat. The initial mission for Helicopter 99R was to dip out of a nearby pond and perform bucket work at the north end of the fire. Another thunder cell passed over the fire causing a wind shift. A majority of the suppression efforts were then focused to the north, northeast, which was the path the fire was spreading.

At 1824 hours, the Sheriff's dispatch received a 911-emergency call from Don Gilchrist advising them that someone was trapped behind the fireline. Gilchrist was seen driving out of the fire area at approximately 1830 hours and he stopped to inform fire personnel that a second vehicle driven by Mike Larsen remained trapped behind the head of the fire.

1830 to 2000 - Rescue Attempts

At 1835 hours, Helicopter 99R immediately began a search for Mr. Larsen and his vehicle. At 1843 hours, 99R reported that the fire had burned past two travel trailers located on private land in the foothills of Monroe Mountain in the Live Oak Canyon area (Photo 4, Page 5). The fire was burning in dense stands of pinyon-juniper, and up very steep and rocky terrain (Photo 5, page 5). Unable to find Mr. Larsen through the thick smoke, the helicopter mission was ended shortly after 2000 hours.

INCIDENT OVERVIEW, CONTINUED

Photo 4: Live Oak Canyon
campsite.

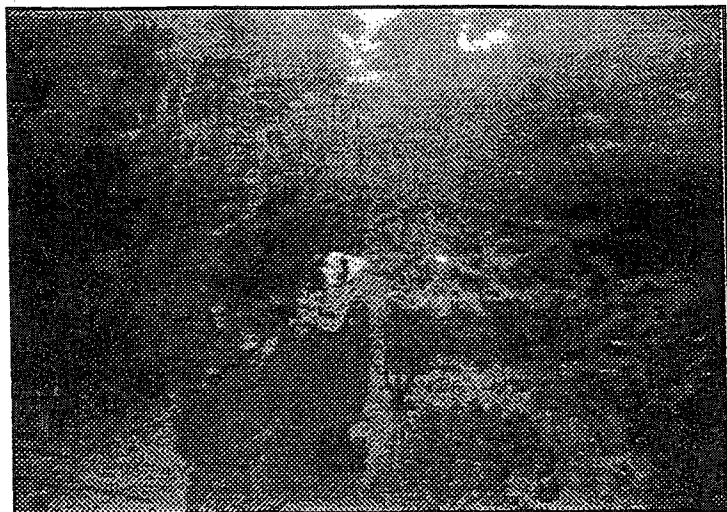
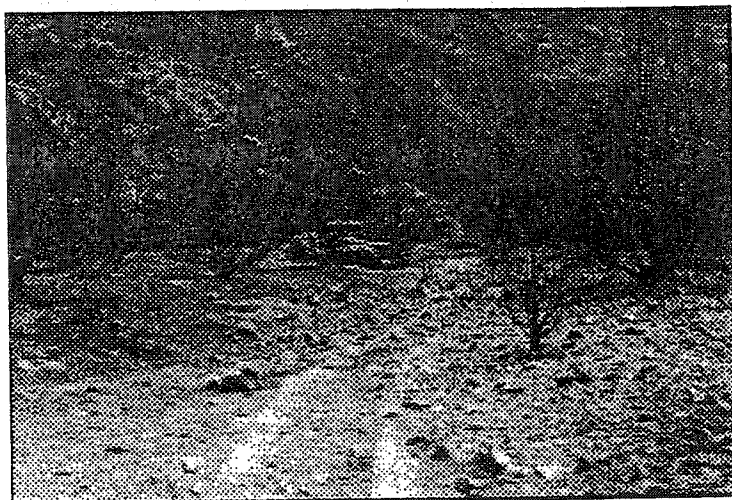


Photo 5: Fire spreading through
foothills and Live Oak
Canyon.



Photo 6: Mike Larsen's burned-
over vehicle.



INCIDENT OVERVIEW, CONTINUED

2000 to 0400 - Search Attempts

At 2000 hours, BLM Fire Control Officer Charles Wentlender assumed the Incident Command position for the Flat Fire. He requested law enforcement assistance to help with the road block efforts. Fire conditions remained too dangerous to safely conduct a ground search of the area. The local Search and Rescue system was activated by the Sheriff's Office shortly after 2100 hours. Attempts to find Mr. Larsen by the local team were suspended at 0100 hours the following morning. The search was judged too risky under the circumstances; however, the family was allowed to continue looking. At 0411 hours, on July 16, 1997, Mr. Larsen's body was located on a burned over slope several hundred yards above his abandoned vehicle (Photo 6, Page 5, and Map 3, Page 2).

July 16, 1997 - Closing Events

The fire continued to burn actively into the early morning hours. To ensure firefighter safety, most of the initial attack forces were released from the fire at 0215 hours. The IC and one engine remained on the fire throughout the remainder of the night. The recovery of Mr. Larsen's body was performed in the early daylight hours. A Type I Incident Management Team (Birch) took over the fire that evening. The estimated size of the fire was 6,000 acres.

Conclusion

Based on a review of the findings, the investigation team determined that fire suppression actions did not contribute to the accidental death of Mr. Larsen. Furthermore, extreme fire behavior conditions prevented any opportunity to successfully attempt a rescue.

METHODOLOGY EMPLOYED TO CONDUCT THE INVESTIGATION

On Wednesday, July 16, 1997, the Bureau's Fire and Aviation Headquarters Office was informed of an accident that resulted in the death of a private citizen who was overrun by a wildfire. At the request of the local line manager (BLM's Richfield District Manager), and with the concurrence of the Director, Fire and Aviation Management, an accident investigation team was formed.

By 1300 hours Thursday, July 17, 1997, a six-person team was formed and on site for an initial briefing by the Richfield District Manager and staff. The team consisted of:

- Team Leader _____ Mike Green - BLM District Manager, Oregon
- Health and Safety _____ George Solverson - USFS Health and Safety, Oregon
- Chief Investigator _____ Mike Gilkerson - BLM Range Technician, Montana
- Technical Fire _____ Rodger Vorce - BLM Office, Fire and Aviation, Idaho
- Utah State Fire _____ Dave Dalrymple - Utah State Forestry, Fire and State Lands, Utah
- Public Affairs _____ Anne Stanworth - BLM Public Affairs, Utah

Following the briefing, the team met to discuss their roles and responsibilities and to specifically identify their mission and objectives related to the accident. The team determined that since the accident involved a private citizen trying to retrieve private property from private land, the jurisdiction and responsibility for the investigation of the fatality belonged with the local law enforcement agency (Sevier County Sheriff's Office). Consequently, the team determined that their investigative responsibility should be: Examine the actions taken by the interagency fire organization and supporting departments to determine if any action(s) taken in any way contributed to the accident, and to determine if there were any action(s) that could have been taken that might have prevented the accident.

The techniques employed by the team included developing questions that were used during individual interviews and/or the preparation of witness statements. All personnel who were part of the initial attack forces, responsible for dispatching the forces, or responsible for overseeing their actions were either interviewed or asked to prepare written statements. The accident site was investigated as was the burn area that represented the approximate size of the fire at the time of the accident. Additionally, interagency agreements, training records, and material collected prior to the team's arrival, including maps, photographs, plans, radio logs, etc., were examined.

Following the initial briefing, immediate contact was made with representatives of the Sevier County Commissioners (Richard Leyba) and Sevier County Sheriff's Office (Lt. Delbert Lloyd). The intent of the contact was to discuss with them our investigation objectives, and to determine if there were any concerns about our perceived role in the accident investigation. It was also our intent to determine if a copy of the Sheriff's accident report could be obtained as a part of this accident report. Both representatives were extremely cooperative. We mutually agreed that our team would be responsible for investigating the Federal/State suppression actions associated with the fire and the County would investigate and prepare the fatality accident report. It was agreed that our team could use the fatality investigation report prepared by the Sheriff's Office and include it as a factual part of this report.

FATALITY FINDINGS AND CAUSAL FACTORS

Findings:

- Two private citizens (Mr. Gilchrist and Mr. Larsen) traveled to the Live Oak Canyon area in separate pickup trucks during the early stages of the Flat Fire.
- The men had traveled to the Live Oak Canyon area in an attempt to retrieve a dog (Mr. Gilchrist) and a travel trailer (Mr. Larsen).
- At the time the men entered the area, the closest fire (northern fire) was approximately one-half mile to the west.
- The men were attempting to leave the area in separate vehicles, with one trailer in tow, when they became alarmed that the fire was threatening the road they were driving down.
- The men stopped and unhooked the trailer.
- After detaching the trailer, Mr. Gilchrist chose to drive his vehicle east down a dirt road approximately 2 miles to the safety of a paved county road to the north.
- Mr. Larsen turned his truck around and tried to escape the fire by going southeast.
- Mr. Larsen immediately drove off of the dirt road, up a steep slope covered with heavy vegetation.
- Mr. Larsen drove his 4x4 pickup up the slope to the east, then he turned south, where he was stopped by a narrow dry creek draw.
- Mr. Larsen abandoned his vehicle and traveled on foot up a steep slope several hundred yards until he was overrun by the fire.

Direct Causal Factor

- Mr. Larsen died of smoke and soot inhalation while trying to escape the path of a rapidly spreading wildland fire that was burning up a steep, heavily-fueled slope.

Indirect Causal Factors

- Environment

The fire behavior was extreme due to strong winds, heavy fuels, and steep slopes. The combination of extreme fire behavior, and changes in wind direction, put Mr. Gilchrist and Mr. Larsen in serious danger.

FATALITY FINDINGS AND CAUSAL FACTORS, CONTINUED

- Human Factors

The men were motivated by good intentions to save their property, but tragically misjudged, underestimated, or discounted the risk this wildfire presented.

Mr. Larsen made a fatal decision not to follow Mr. Gilchrist down the road to safety.

MANAGEMENT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

During the course of the fatality investigation several findings were identified relevant to the management of the Flat Fire and the associated activities that took place during the course of the fire. Although these findings in no way contributed to the accidental death of Mr. Larsen, they are important in terms of overall firefighter and public safety. The investigation team felt that these findings and recommendations should be included in this report to assist not only the managers of the Richfield Interagency group and their partners, but also other groups who may face similar situations.

INTERAGENCY FIRE ORGANIZATION AND OPERATIONS

Finding:

Fire suppression resources from the local volunteer fire departments, State, and Federal agencies responded quickly, and there appeared to be good coordination and cooperation given the dynamic nature of the incident. A meeting of agencies' representatives earlier in the year likely contributed to the general success of this cooperative firefighting effort.

Recommendation:

The Richfield Interagency Fire organization should continue to strengthen this partnership through joint meetings, exercises, and training with the local units.

Finding:

Structural fire department personnel were at a disadvantage fighting a wildland fire because they did not have wildland firefighting engines or wildland personal protective equipment (PPE).

Recommendation:

Jointly study opportunities and options to acquire wildland PPE and other equipment for the local volunteer fire departments. Wildland firefighting training should also be an integral part of this effort.

Finding:

Some wildland firefighters expressed frustration over not being able to concentrate solely on fighting the wildland fire because of the need to provide structure protection and crowd control.

MANAGEMENT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, CONTINUED

Recommendation:

1. Wildland firefighting agencies should continue to direct and train employees on their roles and responsibilities concerning interface fire protection. The wildland interface problem will continue to grow more common and complex. It is essential that wildland firefighters develop skills, knowledge, and be prepared to routinely and effectively manage interface incidents.
2. The Richfield Interagency Fire organization and Sevier County Sheriff's office should develop a formal agreement addressing emergency management response. The agreement will assist in the recognition of agencies' roles and responsibilities associated with traffic control, suppression, structure protection, etc.

Finding:

Private citizens put themselves in harm's way of the fire and their presence complicated fire operations. The response by some private citizens suggest a lack of awareness and general disregard of the potential danger wildfires can create, and the problems their actions can cause to the safety of fire suppression operations.

Recommendations:

1. The interagency fire community should strongly consider taking action to advance the local fire prevention program.
2. Protocol should be established to immediately notify the local media whenever wildfires potentially threaten lives and property. The public needs to be reminded of the dangers of wildfire and be knowledgeable about how hindering a crowd can be on firefighting operations.

WILDLAND INTERFACE FIRE PREVENTION/EDUCATION

Finding:

When the Flat Fire raged across Poverty Flat and up Live Oak Canyon to the top of Monroe Mountain, it consumed most of the live vegetation in its path. However, the area around the Live Oak Canyon campsite was not completely burned. In fact, a travel trailer located at the site was not destroyed in part because of modifications people made to the native vegetation.

MANAGEMENT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, CONTINUED

Recommendation:

Individuals should become knowledgeable about how to protect homes and improvements from the threat of wildland fire. Interface fire protection cooperatives, fire prevention specialists, and volunteers can provide practical, effective, and cost efficient information to help homeowners, builders, and developers take steps to improve the survivability of homes and property. Educational opportunities should be provided on how to establish defensible space around homes, and what emergency action can be taken to avoid being injured by wildland fire.

COMMUNICATIONS

Finding:

There was no direct radio communications between fire suppression personnel and local County Sheriff's Officers on the incident. In addition, radio communications with fire department personnel appeared to be limited.

Recommendation:

The Richfield Interagency Fire Organization, including the dispatch office, volunteer fire departments, and County Sheriff need to develop the capability to effectively communicate with each other via radio.

Finding:

Some fire suppression personnel were uncertain about who was "in charge" on the incident.

Recommendations:

1. The IC should maintain direct communications with key suppression personnel at all times.
2. Suppression personnel must be persistent and assertive in identifying the IC.
3. Dispatch should identify and report the name of the IC to all resources they dispatch to an incident.

Finding:

The IC was out of direct radio communication with ground forces while flying in the helicopter.

MANAGEMENT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS, CONTINUED

Recommendation:

An IC should not fly reconnaissance without being able to communicate directly with personnel on the incident. Helicopter program managers must ensure that the IC has direct communications with the firefighting personnel on the incident.

Finding:

Federal Law Enforcement was not notified until several hours after the incident began. Law enforcement assistance could have been used early on in the incident.

Recommendation:

Establish a dispatch protocol that ensures timely notification of Federal Law Enforcement to advise them that an incident is in progress.

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Finding:

County Search and Rescue personnel were directed and permitted to drive and walk within the perimeter of an active, uncontrolled wildland fire, without the benefit of fire training, PPE and communication with the Incident Commander.

Recommendation:

Interagency Fire and Search and Rescue representatives should meet and establish a formal agreement dealing with communications, training, PPE, and roles and responsibilities on wildland fire incidents.

APPENDICES

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- Sevier County Sheriff's Accident Report _____ A
- Chronology _____ B
- Witness Statements _____ C
- Wildland Fire Entrapment/Fatality (Initial Report) _____ D
- Interagency Fire Center Transmission Log _____ E
- Sevier County Sheriff's Dispatch Log _____ F
- Weather Reports _____ G
- Fire Origin Investigation _____ H



APPENDIX A

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SEVIER COUNTY SHERIFF'S ACCIDENT REPORT

SEVIER COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE DETAIL INCIDENT REPORT

Incident #: 9707-203

NARRATIVE:

This report deals with a wildfire that started in the Poverty Flat area south of Monroe and spread up the west side of Monroe Mountain. Some 6,331 acres burned. A 21-year-old male subject was caught behind the fireline and was burned to death. Accidental Death. Fire started by two lightning strikes.

This report relies on statements from the following:

- Ray Taylor _____ 911 report lightning strikes
- Martha Ellis _____ 911 report lightning strikes
- Tami Everson _____ 911 report lightning strikes
- Sergeant Kim Sorenson _____ observations
- Deputy Charlie Ogden _____ observations
- Don G. Gilchrist _____ witness statements
- Ivan Washburn _____ witness statements
- Dr. G.L. Morford, M.D., D.M.E. _____ Medical Examiner's Report
- Bob Stroud _____ Fire Investigator's Report
- Lt. Delbert E. Lloyd _____ observations

ATTACHMENTS:

- Bob Stroud's investigative report
- Area Map
- Sgt. Sorenson's supplemental reports dealing with the interviews of Ivan Washburn and Don G. Gilchrist.
- Timeline taken from dispatch logs.

DETAILS:

On or about 1642 hours Public Service Dispatch received a call from Ray Taylor, 527-3785, 1595 South Jones Road. The caller reported two lightning strikes in the Poverty Flat area. Two more calls came in - one at 1649 from Martha Ellis, 527-4383 and Tami Everson, 527-3354. All three 911 reports dealt with two lightning strikes.

SEVIER COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE DETAIL INCIDENT REPORT, CONTINUED

This report will not go into great detail concerning the fire or its origin but relies on the report of fire investigator, Bob Stroud. This report will however deal with the accidental death of Michael Brent Larsen, DOB: 07/03/76, age 21, who lived with his wife at Michael's father's residence located at 174 West 2500 North, Austin, Utah.

On or about 1824 hours Public Service Dispatch received a 911 call from a cell phone. The call was made by Don G. Gilchrist, DOB: 07/12/32, 150 East 300 South, Monroe, Utah, Phone #527-4021. Mr. Gilchrist reported that there was a man trapped behind the fireline in the foothills south of Monroe.

On or about 1826 hours Public Service Dispatch received a 911 call from cell phone. The call came in from Clinton George Jones, 896-4575, 360 West 300 South, Richfield, Utah. Clinton was unavailable for interview at the time of this report. I did speak with his mother, Trish Jones. She told me that her son was having a very difficult time and had to leave the area for a few days because he had called Michael and was talking with him when the phone went dead and had told his mother that he was on the cell phone with Michael and he was screaming for Clint to come and get him that he was burning and the phone went dead.

Clinton will be interviewed later.

On or about 1850 hours Sgt. Sorenson, who had been advised by fire dispatch that there were vehicles in the foothills and they needed to be taken out of there, arrived in the area and met with Don Gilchrist.

(SEE SUPPLEMENTAL REPORT by Sgt. Sorenson)

At 2025 hours Sgt. Sorenson advised dispatch to call the victim's family and notify them of the circumstances and that WE could not locate Michael or his truck.

On or about 2115 hours Sgt. Sorenson advised dispatch to call out the South Sevier Search and Rescue members to organize a search of the area for the victim.

Lt. Lloyd came on duty on or about 2115 hours. Deputy Ogden was left in command, Sgt. Sorenson was in command of the search efforts. I called out four deputies to clear the area of citizens who in an attempt to observe the fire had created a traffic problem that was congesting the area for emergency personnel.

Lt. Lloyd made it to the scene of the search on or about 2350 hours. A decision had been made to cancel the search for the night and to start again at first light in the morning. The Search and Rescue teams had not been able to locate the body but had found the victim's pickup truck. A 1986 Chev pickup half ton 4x4. The pickup had been burned completely.

Appendix A

SEVIER COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE DETAIL INCIDENT REPORT, CONTINUED

The victim's father had been with me and refused to stop searching. I gave him permission to continue if he got someone else to stay with him.

I took him to his truck and he said that he would get his brother and two 4-wheelers and then continue the search. I told him that I would be back and gave him dispatches telephone number and told him to call if he found his son.

I arrived back at the scene on or about 0430 hours. Dispatch had received a 911 call at 0411 hours from the family reporting that they had found Michael's body some 350 yards north of the pickup truck.

I made my way to the body, called dispatch and requested Sgt. Sorenson and Deputy Ogden come to the scene with equipment to remove the body. I canceled the 0600 search.

The body was lying face down on the ground, the right leg drawn up as though the victim had fallen down while running or had tried to crawl. The victim's arms were above his head in what looked like an attempt to cover his face. His clothing was completely burned from the body leaving only the victim's shoes on his feet. The body was badly burned from head to toe. When the other deputies arrived the body was turned. The face was gone exposing the victim's teeth and the body was burned and no clothing on the front of the body either. There was a small amount of belt left but the metal parts of the belt had fallen off.

The body was photographed by myself, it was loaded into two body bags and myself, Sgt. Sorenson, Deputy Ogden, and Forest Ranger Maggie Williams carried the body down the hill and transported it to Magelby's Mortuary in Richfield, Utah.

The Medical Examiner, Doctor Morford, Richfield Office, was called and this report contains a copy of his report.

The body was transported north to the Medical Examiner's Office in Salt Lake City along with the victim's dental records. The body was burned too badly to make a positive identification.

At the time of this report no contact has been made with the Salt Lake Medical Examiner, Rudy Riet, (801) 884-8410.

SEVIER COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE DETAIL INCIDENT REPORT, CONTINUED

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

NAME: Ivan Washburn

DATE: 07/19/97

CASE #

Comp states that he saw both of the lightning strikes and within 5 minutes he could see smoke from both locations.

Comp was watching the area with a pair of field glasses and could see two trucks, one was white in color, the other was red; however, they were far enough away to be unable to tell makes or models of the two vehicles.

Where Mr. Washburn first saw the truck they were side by side like they were talking to each other and at that time the wind was blowing to the west.

The red truck drove up into a small canyon and the white truck turned around and followed him up in. A few moments later the red truck came back down pulling a trailer and then stopped on the road. The white truck was following. The wind was now blowing to the east then just a few moments after that the smoke got so bad he could not see which way the trucks went. It wasn't until after the smoke died down that he then saw a white car driving back up into the same area where the trucks were last seen.

Appendix A

SEVIER COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE DETAIL INCIDENT REPORT, CONTINUED

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

NAME: Don G. Gilchrist

DATE: 07/19/97

CASE #

Question: How did Mike know about fire? Unknown.

When they went in did they see any fire fighters? None.

What time did they go in the area? Approximately 1830 hours.

What time did they come out? Approximately 1845-1900 hours.

What time did he actually get to a safe location? Whatever time it was when I called Dispatch stating there is a man trapped behind fireline (actual Dispatch time was first called 1824 hours - second call 1826 hours).

Don stated he saw the fire from Labrum Ford Sales, where he works at the body shop. He figured around 3-4 p.m.. He did not look at the time. But he left work anyway and headed up to where he and his son have their trailers parked because his son, James, had his dog up at the trailers and he didn't want the dog to panic.

When Mr. Gilchrist arrived he met a truck coming down the driver of which is a friend of his son's. Last name Ellison, first name unknown. But he works at Albertsons. Ellison stated that he drove by the live oak area and could hear a dog barking so he drove up to the location and got the dog; he knew who the dog belonged to so he was just bringing him down. Don thanked him and took the dog, but as long as he was up there he decided to go on up and check on the trailers as long as he was this close so went up and on his way back down was when he met Mike Larsen. Until this moment he had never met Mike before.

Mike apparently knew who Don was because he stopped and told him that he was on his way up to get James' trailer out before the fire got it. So Mike went on up to the trailer to hook on, the fire being approximately one-half mile or thereabouts. Don figured they had plenty of time so he turned around and followed Mike back into the trailers, they hooked on and Mike pulled out first, then Don turned around again and followed Mike out. About half way down the road Mike just stopped so Don drove around the trailer on the downhill side and pulled up alongside of Mike. Mike was concerned what he was going to do because the flames were now about 50 feet away and were jumping across the road in front of them.

Don stated leave your truck and trailer and get in with me. Mike stated no, he wouldn't leave his truck. Don said alright, let's unhook from the trailer then get out of here because we won't make it with the trailer. By the time that they had unhooked, the fire was now about 10 feet away.

Appendix A

SEVIER COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE DETAIL INCIDENT REPORT, CONTINUED

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT, CONT...

Don said that the wind was coming from the east but it was like the fire was pulling the oxygen right down out of the canyon to feed the fire.

Don figured their only chance was to just go like mad down the road right through the flames to the main road, then cut across. Don stated he could see through the flames to the other side where it was burned out and there was only smoke. As Don drove through the flames he looked into his mirror and saw that Mike had made a U-turn and was now going up the hill. Don could not figure out what he was doing unless it was because Mike thought he could go back to the camp area and take the north road down. But when Don reached the Y in the road for the north access road, Mike never came out. Don drove down off the mountain and when he got to a safe location from the fire was when he called 911 stating that there was a person trapped inside the fireline.

APPENDIX B

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CHRONOLOGY

CHRONOLOGY

July 15

- 1652 During a 10-minute period ending at 1652, the Sheriff's Office received three calls from private citizens of two lightning strikes and smokes in the Poverty Flat area.
- 1651 Richfield Interagency Dispatch Center receives a report of strikes in Monroe Valley. Monroe VFD dispatched.
- 1655 Engine 5, Chris Colton, dispatched from Richfield.
- 1657 Engine 841 dispatched from Salina Canyon.
- 1659 Engine 3A71, Tina Greenhalgh, dispatched from her home in Annabella.
- 1700 Kelly Allen dispatched from the Dispatch Center.
- 1702 Monroe VFD on scene.
- 1708 Tina Greenhalgh on fire.
- 1723 Helicopter 99R is dispatched from the Richfield Airport.
- 1725 Richfield Interagency Dispatch Center informed that "people" are starting to congregate. Warren Sorenson, Center Manager, contacts UHP dispatch, relays the information and requests units to control access.
- 1726 Chris Colton designated IC of the smaller southern fire, and Tina Greenhalgh designated IC on the more northern fire.
- 1731 Fire reported crossing the Mountain Fuel Pipeline and is nearing a power line.
- 1741 Sheriff's log indicates barriers established from County Road.
- 1755 Reported by Chris Colton that Rick Larson needs to move his trailers. Rick Larson is not related to the victim. This action took place on the southern perimeter of the fire, re moved by some distance from the fatality site.
- 1817 Decision is made to treat both fires as one. Kelly Allen is the IC.
- 1822 Structures threatened on northern side of fire.

CHRONOLOGY, CONT...

- 1824 Sheriff's log a 911 call that someone is trapped behind the fire line.
- 1826 Sheriff's log a second 911 call, subject trapped inside fire line.
- 1830 Greenhalgh reports during the interview that a white vehicle appears obviously coming from within the fire area. The driver of this vehicle indicates that another vehicle remains trapped behind the fire line.
- 1835 Allen needs to talk to helicopter (99R). Vehicle may be trapped at head of fire.
- 1843 99R tells IC Allen that the fire is already past the trailers.
- 1848 Allen tells Greenhalgh to stop backhoe from proceeding any further, that no one is to go into the area.
- 1851 Greenhalgh radios that it is a red truck not a white one. Apparently, there had been some confusion over the color of the trapped vehicle.
- 1851 99R radios that it saw all three trailers but no vehicles.
- 1900 99R headed for re-fuel, canyon locked in with smoke.
- 1926 99R refueled and returning to the fire for reconnaissance.
- 1949 Allen told to return to Center.
- 2000 Approximately. Charles Wentlender assumes the IC position.
- 2008 99R says reconnaissance operations normal.
- 2011 99R reconnaissance completed, tying in with Wentlender.
- 2012 Wentlender asks law enforcement to close all roads.
- 2020 99R returns to station for the night.
- 2025 Sheriff's log notified family.
- 2114 Sheriff's log indicates that Search and Rescue efforts begin with callout of the posse.
- 2201 Sheriff's log called for additional officers for traffic control.

CHRONOLOGY, CONT...

July 16

- 0100 Beginning at 0100 and ending at 0200, the Sheriff's log indicates Search and Rescue personnel were pulled off the fire until 0600.
- 0200 Beginning at 0200 and ending at 0300, most engines are pulled off the fire.
- 0411 Sheriff's log indicates a body had been found.
- 0730 Body removed from site.