



data points

Data Points is a publication produced by the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center to highlight a collection of similar events or lessons signaling a need for specific action. Data Points is published on an as needed basis as the result of ongoing analysis.

Recurring Lesson: Equip all UTVs with an accessible and serviceable fire extinguisher.

Over a 10-year span we have recorded eleven separate incidents related to UTVs catching fire.

"The operator noticed the brakes were not working. After a second attempt of mashing the pedal to the floor, the operator looked down- and realized that the floorboard under his feet was on fire."

Unit 217 Prescribed Fire UTV Fire RLS 2020

Incident Name	State	Year	Main Issue
Little Mesa Fire UTV Fire	CO	2023	Exhaust pipe & muffler weld failure
Cottonwood Fire UTV Fire	AZ	2023	Fuel line connection failure
Illinois Prescribed Fire UTV Fire	IL	2023	Torch arm weld joint failure
Game Farms Prescribed Fire UTV Fire	NJ	2023	Ignition spheres ignited onboard
Compartment 15 Prescribed Fire UTV Fire	TX	2022	Punctured fuel tank
Red Rio Prescribed Fire UTV Fire	NM	2022	Debris between bed & cab
Buck/Trout Creek Prescribed Fire UTV Fire	TX	2021	Possibly electrical & debris
Unit 217 Prescribed UTV Fire	FL	2020	Debris under floorboard
Moose Creek Prescribed Fire UTV Fire	AK	2017	Debris under floorboard
Ponderosa Prescribed Fire UTV Fire	UT	2016	Possibly electrical or ember
Wichita Mtns NWR UTV Flammable Debris	OK	2014	Debris under floorboard

In several instances a fire extinguisher was not available to use. In one case the fire extinguisher was inaccessible (in compartment under seat, seat was on fire). In one case the fire extinguisher did not discharge. In a few of the situations, the fire extinguisher was present and worked as designed. It is worth noting that not all agencies require fire extinguishers on UTVs.

Recommended Action:

Equip all UTVs with easily accessible fire extinguishers.
Regularly inspect and maintain fire extinguishers.
Inspect all UTVs for flammable debris buildup.



Training:

Once your unit has outfitted all UTVs with fire extinguishers, complete the following:

- ☐ Incorporate **30-day inspections** on all vehicle fire extinguishers.
- ☐ Train on accessing the fire extinguisher (know where it is and how to quickly grab it).
- ☐ Update inspection routine/form to include looking for flammable debris buildup.

Review the lessons on the next two pages captured from the incidents mentioned above.

Fire Extinguisher Related Lessons

2023 - [Illinois Prescribed Fire UTV Fire](#)

Fire extinguishers were missing on the UTV and the UTV torch mounting bracket, potentially delaying quick knock down of the rapidly spreading fire in the bed of the UTV.

Always check for fire extinguishers on UTVs.



2022 - [Compartment 15 Prescribed Fire UTV Fire](#)

The fire extinguisher assigned to the UTV was not used during this incident. The fire extinguisher was placed in a storage bin under the passenger seat. With fire intensifying and impacting the passenger seat, the UTV Operator was not able to access the extinguisher.

Is the fire extinguisher on the equipment you are operating mounted in a location you can access during a time of need or emergency?



2021 - [Buck/Trout Creek Prescribed Fire UTV Fire](#)

Immediately, the UTV Operator got out and began to use the 30-gallon UTV water pump mounted in the bed of the UTV to try to extinguish the flames. Realizing that he wasn't having much of an effect, he ripped the seats out to get better access, which revealed the fire extinguisher, but this also allowed oxygen to get to the fire, causing it to flare up more. The UTV Operator then took the fire extinguisher out, pulled the pin, and squeezed the handles together. Nothing happened. The fire extinguisher "felt like it didn't have any power."

Fire extinguishers should be BOTH annually inspected by a certified professional AND inspected every 30 days for usability by those working in the vicinity of the extinguisher.

Inspection Related Lessons

2023 – [Red Rio Prescribed Fire UTV Fire](#)

While traveling through the unit in the UTV, I had to drive over tall grass and brush. There were three of us in the UTV on this patrol, and we were not aware that some of the vegetation had become wedged between the UTV's bed and cab. As I continued driving and patrolling the fire's edge, this wedged vegetation caught fire and melted a corner of the UTV's bed.

When driving UTVs in tall fuels, periodically check the vehicle for vegetation.

Moving forward, we will constantly check the UTV for vegetation when driving over tall grass and brush.

2020 – [Unit 217 Prescribed Fire UTV Fire](#)

While operating a 2018 Polaris 900 UTV on a prescribed fire, the operator looked down and realized that the floorboard under his feet was on fire.

Establish standard operating procedures that include hosing down the under carriage of UTVs after each use. The compartment under the floorboards is not obvious and is not easily cleaned by daily washing.



2017 – [Moose Creek Prescribed Fire UTV Fire](#)

While using a 2013 Polaris 6x6 UTV on a prescribed fire, an accumulation of fine fuels located in an enclosed compartment under the UTV's floorboard and above the skid plate ignited.

Periodically clean out under floorboards of UTVs.



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