

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: UTV Rollover

Date: December 13, 2023

Location: Buchanan Ridge Fire
Ouachita National Forests
Arkansas

The Story and Lessons from a UTV Rollover

After responding to the Buchanan Ridge Fire, a UTV operator began to transport firefighters and equipment to strategic locations along the fireline's perimeter. Part of this route was downhill where a root ball was located in a portion of the installed line.

As the UTV operator, the sole occupant at the time, approached this root ball obstacle, he believed that the best way around it was to drive up against the cut bank side. Cut banks are usually steep and have loose dirt/gravel associated with them—as was the case with this one.

As the operator drove the UTV around the root ball, the front tire gained traction on the cut bank and quickly climbed up the bank, putting the center of gravity too high, causing a slow rollover. Fortunately, due to the very low speed, injuries were minor—bruising and soreness in the left ankle, knee, and hip where the occupant banged into the door and roll cage.



This rollover incident resulted in very minor damage to the UTV.

Lessons

- ❖ The operator recognized the hazards (root ball, cut bank, steep terrain) and chose to use an appropriately slow speed. However, it was surprising how quickly the UTV tire climbed the cut bank and put the UTV out of balance.
- ❖ Wider UTVs usually provide better center-of-gravity, but they become more difficult to maneuver between obstacles. These powerful 4x4 UTVs can quickly climb up and over obstacles and overturn. Newly established fireline may contain loose gravel in which emergency breaking can be difficult.
- ❖ Resist the tendency to normalize risk and understand that accidents can happen even during short trips, over typical terrain, and at low speeds.
- ❖ When an area is questionable for travel, send out someone on foot to scout it out.

Successes

- ❖ Successes in this incident include the rapid notification of the chain-of-command, the presence of an EMT to check for injuries, and a trip to the doctor the next day to evaluate the injuries.

This RLS was submitted by:
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