

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: UTV Fire
Date: June 5, 2025
Location: Barksdale Air Force Base
Louisiana



Barksdale Air Force Base Pile Burning UTV Fire

Air Force Wildland Fire Branch

The U.S. Air Force Wildland Fire Branch (AFWFB), part of the Air Force Civil Engineer Center Environmental Directorate, was established in July 2012 to manage increasing wildland fire threats to Air Force missions.

The AFWFB is a collaborative operation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Colorado State University, and the Bureau of Land Management, focused on ensuring military preparedness through the execution of fuel reduction activities and wildfire mitigation.

Mission

Ensure military mission capability and readiness through a strategic, cost effective, wildland fire program that provides ecosystem management, promotes long-term range sustainment, leverages partnerships, and provides key fire-related information to decision makers.

Incident Summary

By Blake A Stewart

Prescribed Fire Burn Boss Type 2
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

On June 4, at approximately 1930, Firefighter #2 and I inspected the Terra Torch Utility Terrain Vehicle (UTV), cleared all debris from the bed, checked tire pressure, and topped off the fuel for both UTVs in preparation for the following day's pile burning activities.

On June 5, our crew of five U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), 1 Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and 2 U.S. Air Force (USAF) active duty was using the Terra Torch UTV to burn piles on Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana. Between 1330 and 1340 hours, while working on our ninth pile of the day, everything was running smoothly—until Firefighter #1 radioed: *"Terra Torch on fire."*

At that moment, myself and Firefighter #2 were securing the eighth pile, which was approximately 200-300 yards south of Pile #9, the Terra Torch UTV's location. I drove UTV #1 to the Support Truck and the Type 7 Engine to respond with water after Firefighter #1's radio call of: *"We need water."* The RXB2 was in the Type 7 and Firefighter #4 was driving the support truck.

I responded: *"Just a reminder, there are fire extinguishers on the UTV as well. We're on our way."* Several seconds later, Firefighter #1 responded back: *"Terra Torch is not on fire. UTV could use some water. HURRY!"*



Photo taken by the RXB2 as he first approached the Terra Torch UTV fire.

While en route in the Type 7, I contacted the Alarm Room (dispatch center) and activated a medevac site along Moon Lake Road in case there was a “Priority Red Patient”—thinking worst-case scenario.

Upon arrival at the scene, Firefighter #2 and I blocked the road and activated my flashers to alert any oncoming traffic. I exited the Type 7 engine and guided Firefighter #2 toward the two-track road, where he drove in while starting the pump on his UTV. As Firefighter #2 approached the Terra Torch UTV’s location, about 50 yards to the west, I observed that the scene was not hectic. There was no one on fire, no one running around, and no visible panic.

The scene appeared safe. I therefore reported back to support and deactivated the medevac location.

On Scene

After arriving, I immediately checked in with Firefighter #1 and Firefighter #3 to see if they were okay; both responded affirmatively. I inspected the UTV and found that all the fire extinguishers were charged and that water was being used inside and under the main seats. I then noticed that Firefighter #3 appeared shaken. I immediately asked if he needed medical attention. He shared the details of what had happened.

Firefighter #4 (Barksdale-FFT1 Trainee for the day) and I encouraged Firefighter #3 to cool off in the Type 7’s air conditioning. I then returned to the UTV to hear Firefighter #1’s account of this incident. It was at that point that I realized the severity of what had occurred, prompting me to record a video of the UTV at 1353, which lasted 55 seconds.

Injured Firefighter

Around 1405, Firefighter #5 (EMT-certified, Barksdale Air Force Base-active duty, who was on the Barksdale AFB piles) stated: *“I’m going to take Firefighter #3 to Station 3 to get his ear checked out. He’s feeling some heat on it and the ice pack isn’t helping.”*

Firefighter #3 relayed that he didn’t want to go, feeling no need for medical attention. They then headed to Station #3. The injured firefighter was taken to the hospital in a Fire and Emergency Services Command vehicle. The injured firefighter was treated and released from the hospital with 1st degree burns on his nose and ear. He was back at work the next day and has made a full recovery.

Brief AAR is Held

I conducted a *brief After Action Review (AAR)* with all Prescribed Fire (Rx) members for the day, providing them with a real-world Incident Within an Incident (IWI) scenario.

I tasked Firefighter #5 to conduct interviews with everyone. I also instructed the remaining crew to check on the existing piles and mentioned that we were done for the day, which they all acknowledged.



Fire damage underneath the UTV’s seat.



The UTV’s seat cover. The left side is the passenger seat; the right side is the driver’s seat.

Post Incident

Firefighter #2 and I traveled to Fire Station #3 to check on Firefighter #3's status as Emergency Management Services (EMS) arrived. I collected information regarding patient care and recommendations from the local staff to ensure I had accurate details before initiating calls to the appropriate chain of command.

Around 1540, I began calling to report this near-miss incident, share lessons learned, and seek guidance from overhead for all agency heads, Fire Management Officer (FMOs), and Regional Assistant Fire Management Officer (AFMO). By 1830, I had contacted all relevant parties and made them aware of that day's incident, with one FMO unable to answer.

Peer Findings

Through peer reviews and statements from the Terra Torch UTV's driver and passenger, it was determined that the fire originated from underneath the UTV's seat and flared outwards toward the open cabs, to the left of the driver and to the right of the passenger.

The fire did not appear to have originated from the Terra Torch lines or nozzles. Upon further examination from all parties, we noticed all the damage was done underneath the seat. Some wires burned completely as well as one open nozzle with charred rubber and a metal hose clamp.

We believe the fuel line had a leak in it and it leaked onto the exhaust—causing the fire. All fire extinguishers available were used that were on or nearby the UTVs, along with 50 gallons of UTV #3's water. The Terra Torch had one-half tank left of the fuel mix.

All personnel stated that during our AAR of the day's incident, they all felt very clear of medical procedures, 8-Line Incident Medical Response, Barksdale 911 system, grid locations, Tactical Frequency (TAC) frequencies, Incident Within and Incident (IWI) frequencies, and escape routes. PPE was vital to the flash-over inside the UTV. Both the driver and passenger were in full Personal Protection Equipment, except for a facial shroud.

This entire incident and response occurred between 1330 and 1335 at Pile #9.

Phone interviews were conducted with a total of six individuals.

Mechanic's Assessment

One June 6 the UTV was transported to the local Polaris dealership. Upon their inspection they indicated the main fire started on or near the fuel injectors surrounding the engine.



The UTV's engine area underneath the seat cover.

Lessons

- ❖ Check all UTV fuel lines for dry rot or normal wear and tear.
- ❖ Double check all fire extinguishers prior to using the machine.
- ❖ Keep skid plates and engine compartments clean from burnable debris.

- ❖ While working on Department of Defense land, know their procedures for emergency response.
- ❖ Do a pre-season assessment to include looking at trends for the year of all your machines.

This RLS was submitted by:

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