

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Fall Injury Requires Medevac

Date: June 16, 2016

Location: Aspen and Pine Canyon Fires, Utah

If not for the timely and professional actions that surrounded this serious accident, the outcome could have been much worse. In addition, this RLS's "Lessons" highlight how valuable it is to train on emergency medical procedures.

Reaction to Rattlesnake Triggers Serious Fall

On June 16, a local Type 3 Team took command of the Aspen and Pine Canyon fires. While trying to gain situational awareness on these two incidents, the Team Safety Officer and Safety Officer Trainee arrived at the Bumblebee Repeater site (see top photo).

This repeater site, located in between both fires, was a great location for lookouts because it provided a general overview of both fires.

Startled by Rattlesnake

While at the repeater site, the Safety Officer unintentionally stepped on a rattlesnake. Startled by the snake, the Safety Officer stumbled and tried to regain his balance on the steep and rocky hillside.

He landed off balance, but on his feet, which caused him to gain a fair amount of downhill momentum. While propelling downhill and trying to stop, he noticed a piece of rebar sticking out of a pile of rocks. In attempting to miss this rebar, the Safety Officer fell—losing his hardhat—and hitting his head on rocks.

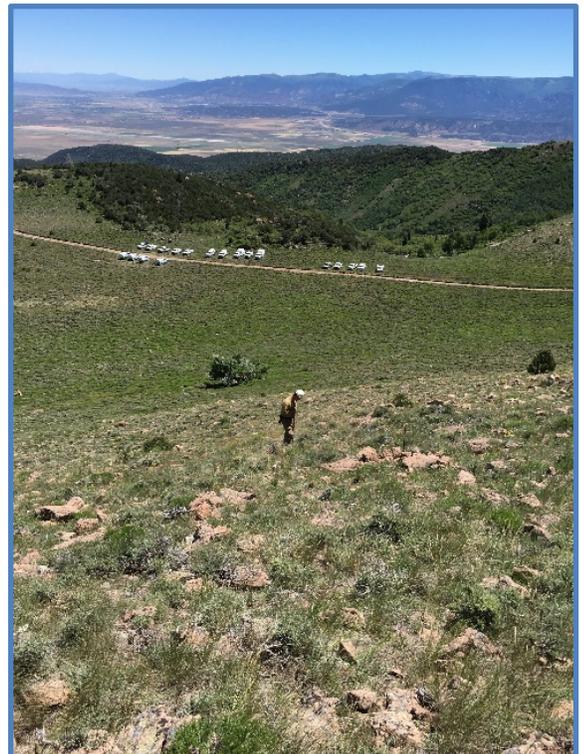
This fall caused a 6- to 8-inch laceration on the top of his head, a fracture to his hand and arm, and various cuts, bumps, and bruises.

9-Line Emergency Medical Procedure Followed

The Emergency Medical Procedure (9-Line) was used and the Safety Officer was flown off of the hill to the Dixie Regional Medical Center via Life Flight helicopter.

A Bureau of Land Management administration employee met the Safety Officer at the hospital to assist with paperwork. After a one-and-a-half day stay for treatment and observation at the hospital, the Safety Officer was released. He spent nine days recovering at home and is currently back to work on light duty.

Top Photo – Provides an overview of the Bumblebee Repeater site where accident occurred. **Bottom Photo** – Was taken from where the Safety Officer stepped on the rattlesnake. The person in the photo shows where the Safety Officer fell and received his injuries during his retreat.



Incident Timeline

Provided by Dispatch Logs and Individual Accounts

1030 (approximately)

While checking the status of the Aspen and the Pine Canyon fires from the Bumblebee Repeater site, the Team Safety Officer steps on a rattlesnake. Upon noticing the snake, the Safety Officer takes a couple quick steps downhill, causing him to gain an off-balance momentum down the steep 35-45% slope. After travelling roughly 40-50 feet down hill and gaining momentum, the Safety Officer noticed a piece of rebar sticking out from a pile of rocks. Trying to avoid the rebar, he stumbles, loses his hardhat, and hits his head on some rocks. This fall causes a 6- to 8-inch cut on his head, fractures his hand and arm, and produces multiple cuts, bumps and bruises.

1032

The Safety Trainee asks the lookout personnel from the Pine Canyon Fire to call the nearby medic from Division Alpha on the Aspen Fire.

1033

The Superintendent from one of the crews takes command of the Incident-Within-an-Incident while the other personnel begin patient care.

1036

This medical incident is initially rated as "Priority Yellow" from the ICS 206 WF.

1040

The decision is made to elevate the priority to "Red" and—due to the patient's loss of blood and head trauma, as well as the distance to the nearest hospital—to medevac the patient to the Intermountain Health Care Dixie Regional Medical Center in St. George, Utah. Radio channels are cleared for this medical emergency by the Incident-Within-an-Incident Commander.

1047

Patient walks, with some assistance, to the vehicles parked uphill at the repeater site.

1055

The Aspen Fire Paramedic arrives on scene and takes over patient care.

1104

Patient is transported via the Paramedic's vehicle to the medevac site as patient care continues.

1108

The Safety Trainee calls the Incident Commander via cell phone to provide an update and to request that someone meet the patient at the hospital to help with a documentation package.

1121

Life Flight helicopter lands, loads patient on board and receives patient information and documentation.

1133

Life Flight helicopter lifts off to transport the patient to the hospital.

LESSONS

The patient received excellent care on the hill. Utilizing the Incident-Within-an-Incident protocols with the local Dispatch and utilizing the Medical Incident Report provided in the Incident Action Plan allowed for expedient care and transportation of the patient to definitive care.

This accident was a series of chance circumstances with an unintended outcome. The outcome could have been much worse.

✓ Being familiar with the Medical Incident Report and conducting training scenarios can make “real life” emergencies run more smoothly. The Alta Interagency Hotshot Crew had drilled on three separate occasions during their critical 80-Hour Training and had an incident last season in which they used the 9-Line. The Flight Nurse commented to Dispatch that the transfer of care was the one of the smoothest, if not the smoothest, that they had ever experienced.

- ✓ Ensure that radio frequencies are in the Communication Plan that are able to communicate with Life Flight. This was the Type 3 Team’s first shift on the fire and the ICS 205 (Communication Plan) did not include the Utah State Fire frequency. This frequency is the agreed upon way to communicate with Life Flight in Southern Utah on wildland fire medical incidents. On-scene personnel had to switch groups to communicate with Life Flight.
- ✓ The Safety Officer is a BLM Fire Operations Specialist with 25 years of wildland firefighting experience. He pack tested at the “Arduous Level”. In a review of this incident, nothing out of the ordinary was found and the 10/18 were not compromised in any way. This accident was a series of chance circumstances with an unintended outcome. The outcome could have been much worse.
- ✓ Working in pairs allowed quick recognition of the problem and quick medical response. There are times when Safety Officers work alone. A similar accident—or one even more severe than this one—happening to an individual working alone could lead to negative outcomes.
- ✓ Having an Agency Liaison at the hospital to ensure that the patient was cared for and that all the paperwork was completed in a timely manner was critical in the success of this incident.

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