



**Event Type:** ATV Rollover

**Date:** July 13, 2025

**Location:** Bullard Canyon Fire  
Oregon

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## The Story and Lessons from this ATV Rollover Accident

On July 13, 2025, at 1957 hours, the Duty Officer for the Sheldon-Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Nevada/Oregon) called the Engine Module Leader regarding several arson-caused wildfires located approximately one-half mile outside of Lakeview, Oregon. The Duty Officer requested the Engine Module to be back in service.

Approximately 15 minutes later, the Type 5 Engine Module reported to the Sheldon-Hart Mountain NWRC fire office in Lakeview. Knowing this area relatively well as a popular hiking location for their PT hikes, the Engine Module Leader determined it beneficial to bring their Sportsman 450 H.D. 4-wheeler ATV for potential access to the fires.

By 2025 hours, the Engine Module, with the Engine Module Leader operating the ATV, arrived in the fire area. They tied-in with other interagency fire personnel and began to construct a plan for accessing the fires.

With a sufficient number of qualified Type 5 incident commanders on the Engine Module, the Engine Module Leader determined it acceptable for the crew to hike in via the popular Nonnie Trail that led directly to one of the fires while he took the ATV to look for routes to additional fires that could be seen burning on the ridge on the opposite side of the canyon.

As the Engine Module hiked to the fire, they identified numerous other locations where someone had attempted to light more fires along the trail.

### ATV Hits Stump and Rolls Over

As nighttime settled in, the Engine Module Leader was driving the ATV into the valley between the canyons when the ATV struck a juniper stump, causing the front wheels to rise up, flipping the ATV and its driver into a backwards somersault. The ATV—along with the Engine Module Leader—did one complete roll and landed upright on all four tires with the Engine Module Leader still in the seat.

The Engine Module Leader then did a quick personal evaluation of their condition. Despite feeling some pain and discomfort in their back around the shoulder blades, the operator determined they were capable of hiking back out to the road. Before beginning the hike, the operator contacted the Duty Officer to inform him of the situation and let him know that he would be hiking out.

The Sheldon-Hart NWRC Fire Duty Officer then contacted the Sheldon-Hart Mountain NWRC Regional Fuels Module Leader (Fuels Mod Leader) and asked if he could immediately go pick up the Engine Module Leader. The Duty Officer was also enroute to the initial attack fires and became the Incident Commander of all the new fire starts for that entire night.

Twenty-two minutes after the rollover, nearing the main road, the Engine Module Leader called the Fuels Mod Leader on the phone to arrange to be picked up. After parking, the Fuels Mod Leader hiked down and helped the Engine Module Leader navigate across a creek with very dense vegetation, eventually arriving back up the hill at the Fuels Mod Leader's vehicle.

Upon visual inspection of the Engine Module Leader, the Fuels Mod Leader decided a medical evaluation was necessary and drove the operator to the Lake County Hospital, located 1.25 miles away.

### **ATV Operator Flown by Fixed-Wing Air Ambulance to Higher Level of Care**

At approximately 2200 hours, the Engine Module Leader arrived at the hospital where a CT scan showed dislocations and fractures to the C6 and C7 vertebrae, as well as significant ligament damage along the spine.

Due to the nature of the injury and the likelihood of a need for surgery, the decision was made by the medical staff for the patient to be transported via fixed-wing air ambulance to the St. Charles Hospital in Bend, Oregon. The Fuels Mod Leader elected to drive to Bend to be with the patient, maintain contact with the Duty Officer, and serve as their Hospital Liaison.

Later that night, once the Engine Module Leader was at the hospital and after the Fuels Mod Leader reported the initial medical diagnosis, the Duty Officer called and left a message with their Sheldon-Hart Mountain NWRC Agency Administrator and the Region 1 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Duty Officer.

The next day, the local Agency Administrator for the Sheldon-Hart Mountain NWRC arrived in Bend. He and the Fuels Mod Leader acted as the Hospital Liaison for the Engine Module Leader on behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The same day, the Engine Module Leader received surgery to fuse the C6 and C7 vertebrae. The next day, the Engine Module Leader was released from the hospital and driven home by the Fuels Mod Leader.

During this incident, the Sheldon-Hart Mountain NWRC Duty Officer, who became the Incident Commander, kept the local dispatch center updated on the ATV accident and related medical updates. The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) became the agency responsible for the new fire starts. In addition, the Incident Commander also kept the ODF Duty Officer and Agency Administrator updated via phone on the ATV accident and medical updates.

### **Status of the ATV Machine**

The morning after the ATV rollover incident, the Duty Officer examined the ATV and scene where the accident occurred. The vehicle was upright, on all four tires. After inspection, it was determined it only had one bent A-arm (a crucial suspension component that connects the wheel hub and spindle to the vehicle's frame). There was no other damage to the machine.

## **Lessons**

- ❖ Even though the Engine Module Leader/ATV operator felt comfortable riding in this type of terrain and the Engine Module members previously hiked many times in this area, as nighttime settled in and it became dark, obstacles that would have been apparent in daylight were now more difficult to see.
- ❖ Performing a self-medical evaluation is not an accurate assessment of one's actual physical condition. Every person's pain level and physical sensations vary.
- ❖ In the moment of injury or accident, the appropriate resources could have responded to the injured individual had they known the severity of the person's condition. Treat most incidents as critical until a higher level of care determines otherwise.
- ❖ Local U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Duty Officers should stay informed of current certified Hospital Liaisons in the event they are needed.
- ❖ The local U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Sheldon-Hart Mountain NWRC Fire Management Officer (FMO), who was the Duty Officer, and who later became the Incident Commander, believes better communication at all levels would have benefited the response to this incident.

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