

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Tree Strike

Date: September 28, 2025

Location Labor Mountain Fire
Washington

The Story and Lessons from this Tree Strike Incident

On the afternoon of September 28, 2025, while scouting direct line for a one-acre spot fire east of the 511-road system, a firefighter on an interagency hotshot crew sustained an injury from a falling tree in Division November on the Labor Mountain Fire. The tree fell from within the fire perimeter, approximately one chain interior.

The tree strike occurred at approximately 1559 hours, approximately 45 minutes after engaging the spot fire. An Operational Medical Support Program (OMSP) EMT arrived on scene by 1600 hours. First responders described the tree as approximately 12 inches in diameter at breast height (DBH) that struck the patient about 40 feet up the trunk, where the diameter was roughly five inches. The patient was found pinned face-down under the tree, which was lying across the thoracic spine and line gear.



Patient being packaged. Photo by the Helicopter Coordinator.

This incident reinforces the reality that medical emergencies can occur despite strong situational awareness. The key lesson is that readiness, calm execution, and cross-discipline coordination can save lives.

The patient was ambulatory and conscious, bleeding from the face and exhibiting memory loss within 15 minutes of the strike—categorizing this medical incident as a “RED” priority. An Incident Within Incident (IWI) was declared immediately, with ground medical and short-haul resources dispatched and an air ambulance requested.

A Rapid Extraction Module Support (REMS) team arrived on scene at 1621, with patient care transferred to the paramedic from the REMS unit at 1623 and Advanced Life Support (ALS) arriving at 1624. Short-haul aircraft were overhead by 1632 and intravenous fluids and medications were administered by 1638. Air operations were coordinated across multiple platforms, including a Helicopter Coordinator (HLCO), Helicopter 7RL, and an air ambulance staged in orbit.

The patient was short-hauled to the Helibase at 1650 and successfully transferred into 7RL. Both helicopters landed safely by 1707. The patient was transferred to the air ambulance at 1711 for transport to Confluence Central Hospital in Wenatchee, Washington. By 1802, the patient was confirmed at the hospital, where the Forest Supervisor and Wildland Firefighter Foundation (WFF) representatives were present.

Fortunately, the firefighter’s injuries were limited to bruising and minor abrasions.



Patient being loaded into the helicopter. Photo by the Helicopter Coordinator.

Key Takeaways

Policy and Protocols Were Followed

The IWI process was initiated rapidly, with proper notifications, aviation coordination, and on-site medical interventions executed in sequence. This reflects the value of preparedness, training, and disciplined response under pressure.

Effective Multi-Agency Coordination

Ground, aviation, and medical resources worked seamlessly under compressed timelines. Aircraft deconfliction and patient handoff were conducted safely despite multiple moving parts and concurrent operations.

Strong On-Site Medical Actions

IV therapy and medication administration were completed prior to air evacuation, stabilizing the patient and ensuring readiness for flight transfer.

Support Systems Activated Quickly

Hospital coordination, Forest Supervisor presence, and WFF notification demonstrate that patient support networks were engaged early and effectively.

Even With Best Practices, Emergencies Happen

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Total Response Timeline

From initial IWI declaration to arrival at higher-level medical care, the response was completed in approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes, reflecting strong coordination across all response elements.

Redundancy and Backup Options

This incident demonstrated the importance of maintaining multiple contingencies for patient extraction and medical care. Having layered backup plans ensured continuous options for evacuation and treatment.

Quick Crew Reaction

The immediate actions of the crew in recognizing the injury, declaring the IWI, and initiating response protocols exemplify the importance of rapid situational awareness and decisive action.

This RLS was submitted by:

Crew Overhead

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