

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Marsh Master Towing Accident

Date: February 7, 2026

Location: Interstate 10 in Mississippi

The Story and Lessons from this Towing Incident

On February 7, 2026, a firefighter was deployed to Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge, located in Moss Point, Mississippi. Operations consisted of mastication preparation (mowing) of firelines for upcoming planned hazardous fuels reduction prescribed fire projects.

After performing readiness checks, the firefighter mobilized at approximately 0830 from the Mississippi Sandhill Crane National Wildlife Refuge Fire Center enroute to Grand Bay NWR. Equipment selected for the project was a Marsh Master Type 2 (MM2) with a hydraulic mower implement.

The firefighter parked and unloaded at the Goat Farm Road Parking Area located on the southside of Bayou Heron Road at approximately 0900. The firefighter mowed firelines for several hours and remained in contact with the Duty Officer (DO) at several points throughout the day.

At approximately 1650, the firefighter texted the DO that the MM2 with mower implement was loaded and was returning to the Fire Center located in Gautier, Mississippi.

Duty Officer Notified of Accident on Interstate 10

At approximately 1700, the DO received a call from the firefighter stating they had been in an accident on Interstate 10 westbound just west of the Exit 75 onramp.

The firefighter would report that the trailer began to sway almost immediately upon merging onto the highway. The swaying was severe enough that they immediately ceased acceleration and attempted to guide the vehicle into the emergency lane. The fishtailing amplified almost immediately—causing full loss of vehicle control. The violent movement of the trailer forced the vehicle to veer into the left lane of traffic heading toward the cable barrier of the median. This is when the trailer overturned completely and caused the vehicle to come to a stop.

The firefighter informed the DO that both westbound lanes were blocked and the MM2 was on its side. The DO inquired about the firefighter's injury status and if anyone else was involved in this incident. The firefighter replied that there were no injuries and no one else was involved. Traffic was backing up on Interstate 10.

The DO directed another firefighter to take a fire vehicle with overhead emergency lights and tools to the incident location in case there was a need to assist in removing the equipment from I-10. Other firefighters were also on



Figure 1 – The overturned trailer carrying the Marsh Master Type 2 with mower blocking both westbound lanes of Interstate 10.

standby to assist if needed. The DO then initiated contacts with the appropriate chains of command informing them of this incident occurrence. The DO then deployed to the incident to assess the situation and gather intelligence.

At approximately 1715, the DO arrived on scene. The Mississippi Highway Patrol was present working on traffic control. The firefighter was not physically injured. The truck was upright with two areas of damage on the rear of the driver's side body.

The trailer was on its left side and the MM2 with mower was still attached to the trailer. The MM2 roof was collapsed and the smell of gas was noticeable. The gasoline smell was discovered as a leaking drip torch and drip torch mix can that had been damaged when the MM2 overturned.

The trailer hitch was disconnected but the safety chains remained solidly connected. Three of the 4-point tie-downs were solid and holding the MM2 and mower snugly on the trailer. After close inspection, the truck tank was not punctured nor leaking diesel. MM2 did not have any fuel or fluid leaks. There were no flat tires on the truck or trailer. Several areas of mud and grass were present on the pavement.

A tow truck with a crane lift was ordered through the Mississippi Highway Patrol. Jackson County Fire Department arrived on scene to ensure there were no injuries, no hazardous materials were present, or fire hazard existed. They sprayed the mud off the pavement. The crane lift arrived and turned the trailer upright relatively easily. A quick assessment found that the tow hitch was sound, safety chains uncompromised, trailer lights were functional, and tires were solid.

In conference with the Mississippi Highway Patrol to prevent further traffic delays, the tow truck recovery team deemed that the truck and trailer were safe to move to the Mississippi Welcome Center that was 0.3 miles to the west for further assessment. Wildland fire vehicles covered the rear with emergency lighting.

At the Welcome Center, additional tie-downs were added to supplement the one that had been damaged in the incident. All assessments found the truck and trailer to be operational and sound to drive back to the Fire Center with emergency lighted vehicle to follow.

All resources were released at approximately 1930 by the DO. The firefighter involved in the incident maintained that no injury had occurred.



Figure 2 – The trailer hitch was disconnected but the safety chains remained solidly connected.

Lessons

Key Lessons Revealed During the Incident Inquiry

1. The employee indicated that mud had accumulated on the mower deck from the tracks during the operations of mowing firelines. The employee did not clean the mud off the mower deck prior to loading the machine and mobilizing back to the Fire Center. At the incident site it was clear that a heavy accumulation of mud was present on the pavement. The mud was concentrated on the mower deck in the very back of the trailer. This likely offset the weight distribution, contributing to fishtailing.
2. The center of gravity for tilt bed trailers might be altered because of implements. When towing a Marsh Master with an implement, a different trailer design may be needed.

3. The employee did not slam on the brakes when the fishtailing began. The employee immediately ended acceleration and maintained steering as steadily as possible. The DO visited the incident site in daylight and found no marks from abrupt braking.
4. The trailer hitch was correctly fitted as recommended at 2 5/16 inches. The hitch did disengage when the trailer turned over, however the safety chains were securely attached and kept the trailer from detaching and becoming a projectile. In studying the paint marks on the MM2 tracks and the jack located on the trailer, the trailer did overturn completely which crushed the cab on the MM2. The paint marks indicated the right track of the MM2 hit the left side of the truck. The jack, also located on the right side, punctured the truck on the driver's side rear quarter panel. If the safety chains had not held, it appears the trajectory would have hit the driver's side of the vehicle with increased momentum and force.
5. The trailer, tie-down straps, and mower were all manufacturer approved. Three of the four tie-downs remained in place and secured the load throughout the rollover of the trailer. The tie-downs were assembled as the required 4-point securement. The one tie-down that broke was the front right side of the trailer that hit the vehicle's left side. The trailer tires had been replaced two months prior to the incident.
6. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Fire Engine Maintenance Procedure and Record (FEMPR) vehicle inspection guidelines, securement, and tie-down policy were all followed. This likely prevented additional damages to the public and highway infrastructure. Additionally, trailer hitch color coding guidelines established from a similar Marsh Master incident were followed and contributed to ensuring the safe towing practices were maintained.

Actions Taken

1. A station review of the Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) will be conducted and amended to include safe trailering guidelines and requirements to remove dirt/debris from rear implements prior to towing.
2. All trailers and equipment will be evaluated to ensure that proper tie-downs are present and that all accessories are secured to ensure that safe trailering continues.
3. The U.S. Wildland Fire Service transition notification tree of potential accidents and serious accident processes will be identified to ensure that reporting will be conducted properly.
4. The Marsh Master Type 2 manufacturer will be contacted to determine safe towing corrections while hauling attachments that could impact trailer weight distributions.

This RLS was submitted by:
**The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Safety and Risk
Management Team**

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