

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Felling/Limb Strike Incident

Date: December 23, 2025

Location: A6 Fire; North Carolina

The Story and Lessons from this Limb Strike

Two North Carolina Forest Service firefighters were measuring the 193-acre A6 Fire's perimeter when they discovered a tree near the fireline that was burning. This was a 70-foot-tall loblolly pine, approximately 14 inches in diameter. Because this tree was dropping fire brands across the line, suppression action was required.

The firefighters decided that the best course of action was to cut the tree, dropping it inside the fire's perimeter. Both firefighters were qualified at the Basic Faller (FAL3) position. While cutting the tree, a burning branch fell from it, striking the faller on the helmet. When the branch hit the full brimmed helmet, it broke into multiple burning pieces—burning the faller's head, neck, and ears. The firefighter received 1st and 2nd degree burns from which he has since made a good recovery and returned to normal duties.



Lessons

While these two firefighters were FAL3-qualified, the fact that this tree was burning would have placed the complexity at the Intermediate Faller (FAL2) level. Next time in this same situation, when sizing up a similar burning tree, the firefighters will either request a more experienced or qualified faller to cut or supervise its removal or request a piece of equipment—such as a bulldozer—to come in and push the tree down.

The North Carolina Forest Service staff trained in first aid did an excellent job of attending to the injured faller as soon as the accident was reported. He was assessed and provided first aid on the scene and was quickly taken to the nearest medical facility by North Carolina Forest Service personnel where he was treated, monitored, and released.

In moving forward, firefighters need to only operate up to the level that their training allows and think of ways that hazard or burning trees can be mitigated in safer ways.

This RLS was submitted by:

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