

Rapid Lesson Sharing



Event Type: Vehicle and Equipment Issues

Date: July 26, 2024

Location: Big Horn Fire; Eastern Washington

Know Your Equipment. Know How It Operates. Know How to Fix It.

By Warren House
Engine Boss on the Big Horn Fire

It's the end of July in Eastern Washington in Kittitas County. There's a grass fire in the "wind farm."

I had just arrived at the Big Horn Fire to take over as Engine Boss for one of our department trucks. After working a couple days on the fire, I discovered concerns with the brush truck's fuel gauge accuracy.

At end of shift, when I would fill the fuel tank in camp, it would only read 7/8 full. But by the time I got out to the line each morning, the gauge would show just barely over half a tank.

Then I discovered there were no saw chaps on the truck. I also found the gas cap on the Dolmar was missing and had been venting excess fumes into the truck's lower storage box.

One morning, I came out to start the pump and discovered it was hydro-locked full of gas. Apparently, there was a fuel shut-off valve that didn't get flipped to "Off." The float/needle in the carburetor was not functioning and the engine filled with gasoline.

To fix this, I had to pull the spark plug and clear the cylinder. In doing so, I broke the spark plug. We didn't have a spare spark plug in our pump kit and had to drive 50 miles one way to replace the spark plug.

Then, shortly after that, the throttle cable for the water pump broke. I had to temporarily fix it with a piece of bailing wire.

By this time, the fire was transitioning to mop up. With all the issues with the truck and pump, I decided to request taking the truck out of service. Following the chain of command, I went to my Strike Team Leader. When we discussed taking the truck out of service, we disagreed. My department found a new Engine Boss and I went home.

Ultimately, this ended up being the last assignment for that truck as it was immediately stripped and replaced with a new vehicle.

Lessons

- Things can fail when you need them most. Know your equipment. Know how it operates. Know how to fix it.
- Know how to properly refuse risk (Pg. 18 IRPG). Be prepared to articulate your concerns and potential safe alternatives.
- Be familiar with and use SAFENET/SAFECOM (Pg. 19 IRPG).
- If the situation allows, communicate critical needs via ICS-213 general message forms.
- Prior to traveling for an assignment, a vehicle inspection checklist should be documented and retained to ensure operational readiness for the crews being dispatched.

- Small inconveniences and miscommunications can escalate if not resolved in a timely manner. Accept responsibility for your actions and be willing to try multiple approaches to a resolution, including a simple apology.

This RLS was submitted by:

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