

# Dozer Transport Rollover

## Rapid Lessons Shared



### Summary

During a period of heightened wildfire danger in the Texas Panhandle in February of 2026, multiple Texas A&M Forest Service resources from other areas of the state were sent to that area to preposition. After several days, the fire danger decreased, and many resources were sent back to their home units. While en route back to their home unit in Montgomery County, a Texas A&M Forest Service transport hauling a Type 4 tractor plow overturned when it exited Interstate 45 on an exit ramp with a sharp curve.

### Narrative

On Saturday, February 21, 2026, multiple Texas A&M Forest Service resources were returning to their home units after pre-positioning for wildfire response in the Texas Panhandle. One of those resources was a Caterpillar D5K2 tractor plow hauled with a 2013 Freightliner M112, driven by Aiden and Katherine. They left the Panhandle at around 06:00 en route to their home unit in Montgomery County, approximately 560 miles away in southeast Texas. While Aiden received his Class A Commercial Driver's License (CDL) approximately six months prior to this trip, he had experience driving large trucks in a previous job in another state prior to coming to Texas. He drove the first leg of the trip, taking them more than halfway to their destination, and then Katherine took over driving. Katherine had her Class A CDL for about nine months with an automatic transmission restriction. Two weeks prior to this trip, she took and passed a driving test in a truck with a manual transmission, which removed that restriction.

Katherine had been driving for approximately two hours down the Interstate when Aiden asked her to take an exit for a rest stop. Anticipating a gradual exit ramp, Katherine did not start decelerating rapidly enough to navigate the exit ramp's sharp turn where it merged with the service road. By the time she noticed how sharp the curve was, it was too late to slow down enough to safely make the turn. (See Google Earth map on next page.) As she took the turn, the tires slid and the truck rolled over, making two complete revolutions. As the truck rolled, the tractor plow broke free of the binders holding it to the bed of the truck and the truck rolled once more, coming to a stop on its wheels. The tractor plow was laying on its side on the ground not far from the truck.



*Aftermath of the rollover accident.*

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***"We thought the dozer was going to crush us." – Katherine***

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When the truck came to a rest on its wheels, Katherine and Aiden quickly assessed their condition and were able to exit the truck on their own. Both were wearing their seatbelts. Katherine was bleeding from a cut on her hand, and Aiden had a bump on his head. A passing motorist stopped to check on them and used Katherine's cell phone

to dial 911. Another motorist that stopped was a nurse and seeing the bleeding wound on Katherine's hand, offered medical care to her.

Aiden and Katherine also realized later that both their agency and personal cell phones had activated their Emergency SOS Crash Detection and automatically called 911 and their emergency contacts. An ambulance arrived approximately 15 minutes after the accident occurred, along with local volunteer fire resources. Katherine and Aiden were both treated on scene and then transported to a hospital about 15 minutes down the road. At the hospital, Katherine received stitches for the cut on her hand, a CT scan of her head, and X-rays of her hand and elbow. Aiden also received a CT scan of his head and X-rays of his back. All scans came back clear, and both were treated and released within about 4 hours.



Aerial imagery showing the vehicle accident location at the sharpening curve of the exit ramp.

When the accident occurred, after 911 was called, several calls were made to Texas A&M Forest Service staff in the area. Two staff members responded from a nearby office to assist in any way they could. They first unloaded a tractor plow from one of their transports at their office and brought the empty transport to the scene in case it could be used to remove the tractor plow from the accident site. Upon arrival, they worked with local resources to request a heavy wrecker, which arrived on scene a short time later. They used the winch on the heavy wrecker to pull the tractor plow onto its tracks. After it sat for about 30 minutes, the crew checked that all fluids were at proper operating levels, and the tractor plow started. They were able to load it onto the empty transport and take it to the nearby office. From there, it was transferred to a heavy haul truck and moved to an agency-operated regional shop. The heavy wrecker transported the wrecked truck from the accident scene to that same shop.

While Katherine and Aiden were at the hospital, the local Regional Operations Chief came to visit them and serve as a hospital liaison until they were treated and released. In that role, he comforted them, answered questions, and completed required paperwork, which included workers' comp and other agency-required documents. Other local agency employees also came to visit them in the hospital. Katherine and Aiden both returned to full duty less than a week after the accident.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **1. Are drivers getting adequate training and experience in the CDL school they attend?**

In order to meet state and federal regulations, all agency CDL drivers must attend a CDL training program that has been approved by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. Approved training providers must meet certain minimum requirements, but there are no minimum hours set for behind-the-wheel instruction. This means that some schools provide more driving time practice than others. The truck driving school that both Aiden and Katherine attended was a three-week program. There are other schools in the area that offer a longer program with more driving practice. Are we considering driver experience when selecting which CDL school to use?

### **2. Do you familiarize yourself with your route before your trip?**

Prior to heading out to your destination, it could be beneficial to look at your planned route to gain familiarity with roads you will be on, turns to take, and exits you might take. It would also be beneficial to look at potential hazards on the route such as load-rated bridges, construction zones, and sharp curves that may be encountered, especially when driving large trucks.

### **3. Does your cell phone have crash detection?**

When the accident occurred, cell phones in the cab had crash detection capabilities, which prompted them to automatically contact 911 and the emergency contact listed on the phone. It was unclear whether this notification or the bystander's call to 911 reached emergency services first. Having this feature enabled on your phones, if available, could expedite response times in an emergency. This feature is found on most iPhones and some Android phones and is turned on by default. On iPhones it can be found by going to Settings > Emergency SOS. This is also where emergency contacts can be seen and edited.

### **4. Do you have a plan for equipment recovery after an accident?**

We all know that an emergency situation is not the time to make a plan. This applies to vehicle accidents. When this accident occurred, phone calls were quickly made and personnel sprung into action quickly to respond to ensure the wellbeing of those involved in the crash and also to recover the equipment involved. Do you know who to call or what to do if you find yourself involved with or needing to assist with a vehicle accident?

### **5. Does your agency have a hospital liaison program?**

When the accident occurred, the local Regional Operations Chief was contacted and assumed the role of hospital liaison for the employees in the accident. Due to previous incidents in his region, he was familiar with the requirements of the role, took care of paperwork, and supported the employees to help them through their hospital visit. Who in your agency is responsible for assuming this role in the event of an accident or emergency? Who is their backup? Are they familiar with the responsibilities associated with such a role? Do you know your agency's paperwork requirements for these situations? Now is the time to plan for this, not when an emergency occurs.