

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: During a proficiency training a medical scenario was conducted using the Forest Service Rappel and Short-Haul Helicopter Programs.

Date: August 27th, 2022

Location: Just off-site of the Smelterville, Idaho Airport.

“What’s the approximate tree height?”

Helicopter Manager

NARRATIVE

On August 27th, 2022, employees from the Custer Gallatin National Forest and the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest helicopter programs conducted a multi-forest medical training scenario at the Shoshone County Airport in Smelterville, Idaho, located on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest.

During the routine proficiency training, the two helicopter programs, one being a rappel platform and the other a short-haul platform, worked together to participate in a medical scenario. The scenario included rappellers rappelling into an injured individual on the forest at which point crew EMTs assessed the patient for injuries and relayed the information to a dispatch (played by the crew). Once the medical information was relayed, an agency short-haul helicopter launched to assess the ability to transport the patient via short-haul to an awaiting ambulance or life flight helicopter.



BACKSTORY

Previous experiences determined that having two specialized helicopter programs who have a likelihood of assisting each other in an incident would benefit from a medical scenario in which the coordination, communication, and transportation of a patient between the two programs would be the focus. During the proficiency rappel, rappellers assisted an injured individual in the forest. Rappel EMTs assessed the patient, communicated the 8-line to dispatch, and requested a short-haul assist due to the terrain and patient condition (severe leg injury). At this point, the short-haul helicopter went into their proficiency and assessed the situation and configured for short-haul operations. The short haulers came into the injured patient, packaged, and transported the injured patient to an awaiting ground ambulance at the airport.



Lessons Learned

- Communication between the ground resources to both dispatch and the inbound helicopter is key. Having a detailed report of the patient's injuries allows for the helicopter to come with the appropriate equipment they might need. Does this mission require a Bowman bag or will a screamer suit work? If it's an injured leg, is it only a rolled ankle or lower leg injury in which a screamer suit could work—saving time for both the short-haulers and helicopter in the air.
- Tree Height – “What is the approximate tree height?” This was a question asked by the helicopter manager to the ground resources as they were assessing the scene prior to configuring for the rappel. This is something not often addressed in short-haul program lectures. Having an estimate on tree height from the ground can make a big difference. We know things look different from the air (often easier). Providing this information could be the difference. If the helicopter came in with short-haulers underneath and the line was too short they would need to go back and reconfigure. This delays transport and puts additional risk to all involved.
- Patient packaging was on a steep hillside with overhead limitations. Consider where you are going to package the patient and the surrounding overhead limitations. Is the patient going to need to be moved because they are directly under a tree? In this situation, as packaging occurred the patient was moved down the hill. This caused the patient to be closer to trees than the original spot of injury. Think about your 3D surroundings. This had the potential to be an issue as the short-haulers secured the patient to the long-line and transported the patient. Is moving the patient possible? Would it save valuable time? Does it reduce the risk of the mission?
- Patient packaging on a steep hillside. To secure a flat surface something could be dug out. What if you don't have a tool with you? Consider using logs or branches. Logs with short limbs protruding off work well as the limbs act as a wedge to secure the log in place. This helped the EMTs have a flat surface to package the patient into the Bowman bag. (See photo on previous page.)
- Training, training, training... The opportunity for the two crews to train together provided both the ability to learn from each other. This training also allowed for the two programs to become more proficient in how they operate together, the equipment each crew carries, and how the process should occur. We are only as good as our weakest link and the ability to conduct live training scenarios are few and far, but these opportunities provide us with strong operators making our links stronger!

To See a Video of This Short-Haul Medical Proficiency Training:

<https://flic.kr/p/2nPCy2Q>

This RLS was submitted by:
Incident Overhead

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