Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: UTV Fire During Prescribed Pile Burning

Date: February 11, 2026

Location: Utah

The Story and Lessons from this UTV Fire

At approximately 1532 hours, during prescribed pile burning operations, a UTV assigned to ignition support became high-centered in soft, disturbed sand near an actively burning tamarisk pile. The terrain had been impacted by prior excavator bucket work, making it uneven.

Briefly, ignition operations had been tactically paused due to forecasted wind increases. A period of holding and monitoring piles had then occurred. Following a decrease in the wind, ignitions started again. This is when the UTV became immobilized. Personnel initially attempted to free the vehicle; however, fire intensity increased rapidly and began impinging on the UTV.

The two operators recognized the escalating risk conditions and disengaged from the vehicle.

Type 6 and Type 3 engines responded immediately upon notification. Water was applied for approximately 10-15 minutes to cool the pile and protect the UTV. Once the heat was reduced, five personnel manually pushed the UTV free. The vehicle remained operable and was driven onto a trailer.

Total time from UTV ignition to stabilization: approximately seven minutes—from 1532 to 1539 hours.

Injuries: None.

Equipment Damage: Primarily plastic UTV components, the seat and the windshield. The vehicle remains functional.

Resources Involved: 1 UTV, 1 Type 3 engine, 2 Type 6 engines, 1 Type 7 engine (county unit); 11 personnel.



This is where the UTV was high-centered in the sand.



Fire and heat damaged the UTV's plastic components and seat and windshield.



Lessons

Timely Risk Recognition: The two operators exited the UTV when conditions escalated.

Rapid Engine Response: Engines returned quickly and applied water. Personnel worked efficiently to cool, assess, and recover the vehicle.

PPE Use: Proper PPE prevented injury.

Supervisor notifications to on-scene fire personnel and area fire management occurred promptly.

Continual observance of weather conditions was occurring frequently to ensure safe operation and prescription adherence. Ignitions had ceased but continued when winds died down during this UTV becoming immobilized event.

1. Personnel demonstrated strong situational awareness by backing away when recovery efforts became unsafe. Early disengagement prevented injury.
2. Dry, aged tamarisk piles can escalate quickly, even without significant wind. Maintain conservative buffer distances for UTVs and mobility equipment near active burn piles. Always remember the minimum buffer distance to be 2½ times the maximum flame length.
3. Disturbed sand and uneven ground contributed to high centering. Maintain clear ingress/egress corridors and avoid positioning equipment in soft or mechanically disturbed areas near heat sources.
4. The Type 3 engine involved carries a 1.5-inch hard line limited to 50 feet. Personnel were unfamiliar with this hose configuration. It therefore took more time to get water from the engine to the UTV. When new apparatus enters service, ensure operators understand hose configuration, length limitations, and operational implications. Have contingency available for situations in which additional hose is needed. Fifty feet of hard line is not ideal to provide adequate coverage around wildland engines.
5. Multiple 2½ pound extinguishers were ineffective against plastic involvement and adjacent pile heat. In such equipment protection scenarios, portable extinguishers may slow fire spread but are not a substitute for water application.
6. Resources on site indicated communications via cell phone between personnel, Dispatch, and the Burn Boss were effective. However, Dispatch communications via radio were limited at different points on the burn due to topography. Although this did not contribute to the UTV incident, crews identified this and understood reaching Dispatch via radio would be difficult in certain areas on the burn. Identify repeater functionality early in operational periods and reinforce alternate communication plans during briefings.
7. Personnel were exposed to brief moments of non-vegetative smoke—the burning plastic. Document exposures using appropriate forms for long-term health tracking. This is documentation, not a claim.
8. Wildland fire operations carry inherent risk. Risk cannot be eliminated, but it can be recognized and mitigated. In this incident, personnel recognized escalating danger, disengaged appropriately, communicated effectively, and stabilized the situation without injury.



Portable fire extinguishers may slow fire spread but are not a substitute for water application.

This RLS was submitted by:

Samual Jamie Rogers; Utah Department of Natural Resources; Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands; Safety Training Coordinator

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