

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Smokejumper Injury/Short-Haul Extraction

Date: July 9, 2021

Location: Elbow Creek Fire,
Custer Gallatin National Forest

This Smokejumper Injury Story Includes the Importance of Short-Haul and How Drought can Now Imperil Some Jump Procedures

Smokejumpers were ordered to staff a small fire on the Custer Gallatin National Forest. After initial size-up of the fire, the spotter and jumper in charge located a large jump spot. The smokejumper aircraft conducted a low-level pass to assess the jump spot for hazards.

The spotter then assessed wind conditions by dropping streamers which displayed no signs of turbulent air. These streamers landed in the middle of jump spot—confirming 300 yards of drift. The spotter then briefed the jumpers who felt confident that the conditions were satisfactory to proceed into jump operations.

Tree Top Breaks, Jumper Falls to Ground

After jumping from the aircraft, turbulent air was felt by the jumpers at approximately 100 feet above ground level.

Jumper 1 attempted to “land” in a tree. But the tree top broke out, causing Jumper 1 to fall to ground, sustaining significant injuries. Jumper 2 was able to successfully land in a tree and perform a letdown procedure.

A National Park Service helicopter, also dispatched to the fire, arrived shortly after this injury incident and landed in the jump spot to provide assistance. After assessing the patient, the EMT decided it would be best to minimize moving Jumper 1 and therefore transport Jumper 1 only one time in the appropriate position of comfort.

Thus, the helicopter configured for short-haul extraction to avoid transferring Jumper 1 multiple times. The patient was packaged and flown to meet a Life Flight helicopter. It took one hour and two minutes from the time of injury until the patient was on the Life Flight en route to a hospital in Bozeman, Mont. where the patient was diagnosed with a broken pelvis, fractured tibia, broken heel, and a mild concussion.

Lessons

- ❖ Throughout the country’s west and interior west, the 100- and 1,000-hour live fuel moistures are at extremely low levels. These trees are very dry and brittle.
- ❖ While “treeing-up” is thought to be a safer option for smokejumpers in turbulent wind conditions, the drought conditions and low fuel moistures may now make this a less desirable option.



Top Photo

The injured Jumper 1’s parachute and top of tree that broke out—causing the accident.

Bottom Photo

The uninjured Jumper 2’s parachute in the tree from which a successful letdown procedure occurred.

(Both of these images are screen shots from a video.)



- ❖ Short-haul is a very effective tool in our toolbox. Well-trained short-haul crews can make a positive difference in patient outcome. Ideally, they would be distributed around the west to support rapid extraction on incidents.
- ❖ Short-haul is itself a high-risk operation.

**This RLS
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