



# LESSONS LEARNED

## Lolo National Forest Safety & Health

### Beeskov Fire MVA That Joe Poke was No Joke 7/31/2019

#### Scenario

You and your coworker are driving down a seldom used Forest System road to look at a potential work site. As is often the case with roads like this, it has a fair amount of Alder growing out of the cut bank. Some spots are brushier than others and it's hard to avoid Alder sweeping against your side view mirror. You both have discussed just walking out the road but there is a lot going on today and the road goes on for several miles yet. It runs up the mountain to a radio repeater site through a typical mixed conifer stand that includes Lodgepole pine. There's dead & down Lodgepole present but so far you haven't had to stop and cut any out of the road grade. Windows up and AC on, you're just driving and talking about the proposed work plan...



..."*Before we knew it the window is exploding!*" It comes right in through the driver's side window, right past your head, across the seat, all the way to the back passenger door by the time you get the truck stopped. "*What the hell just happened? Man, am I*



*freaking alright?*" You look behind you and see a 9 foot piece of Lodgepole pine, 4 inches in diameter. It runs from the backseat all the way out the driver's window, somehow snapping off at that point. You both are checking yourselves and each other to make sure no one is hurt. Unbelievably, you both are fine. Just a scratch on the driver's back, no way! Seriously, how did you not get skewered?

## Reality

Some call those stobs 'Joe Pokes' because they stick out and jab you or your rig when you least expect it. This one was hiding in the Alder. The operator wasn't driving with excessive speed. The window was up and seat belts were on. He was focused on driving, not overly distracted by the conversation. He just didn't see it. The Lodgepole log was lying flat on the ground out into the road prism just enough.



As the mirror brushed through the alder the tip of the log slid perfectly between the side view mirror's bracket. It was directed/pulled right into the cab as the truck moved down the road.

Yes, the driver only received a scratch on the back of his neck. His 'habit' of leaning on the center console when he drives is what prevented him from receiving a life threatening injury. *"Anyone else would have taken it in the jugular!"* the passenger stated pointing to the driver's seat. That uncommon style not taught in driver's education most likely saved the driver's life.

The two stopped, got out of the vehicle and collected themselves. Both were visibly shaken but happy no one was hurt. They notified their supervisor by phone, took some pictures for documentation purposes and cleaned out the rig enough so it could be driven safety back to the district.





## What Went Well?

- Standard safety elements were in place: check in/check out, medivac pre-plan, good communications, driver training and seatbelts.
- Vehicle speed was reasonable and the windows were up.
- Appropriate notifications were made in a timely manner.
- The physical & emotional wellbeing of all involved was immediately considered and made a priority.

## What Could You Do Differently?

- Drive at a slower speed.
- Move further away from the brushy cut bank.
- Walk the road out first or not drive it at all.

## Summing it up

The reality of it all is that most of us have done this before, more than once. The roads in this part of the world get Alder'ed in quickly and there is never enough money or manpower to keep them 100% clear. We have a lot to get done, the road is long and we don't have enough time. -- What will YOU do next time?



*“I burned a life on this one!”*

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