
Northwest Colorado Fire Management Unit



Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, Colorado State Forestry Service, Moffat County

Coyote Basin Fire – Chainsaw Injury 72 Hour Report

From: Garner Harris, South Zone FMO – Investigation Team Leader

To: Ken Kerr, BLM Colorado State FMO

Location: Coyote Basin Fire, Moffat County, CO

Date of Occurrence: May 9, 2012

Activity: Wildland Fire Suppression

Number and Type of Injury: 1 laceration to right leg

Summary:

On Wednesday, May 9, 2012 at approximately 1845, a BLM engine crewmember (swamper) was injured during suppression operations on a mutual aid fire with Moffat County. During the construction of saw line the swamper reached to deflect falling brush from hitting the sawyer. In the motion his right leg made contact with the bar of the chainsaw.

Narrative:

The Coyote Basin fire was an escaped agricultural burn on private land in Moffat County, CO. At 1301, BLM resources (Division 14 and Engine 1644) stationed in Meeker, CO were requested to assist and dispatched to the incident. The fire was located east of Moffat County Road 57, three miles north of the Moffat and Rio Blanco county line. The BLM resources arrived at 1333 and the crew from 1644 was assigned to the west flank to construct line in pinion/juniper.

At 1800 the crew from 1644 was reassigned to the east flank to assist BLM Engine 1419 with line construction in heavy gambel oak (2 ½ to 3 ½ inch diameter and 12-15 feet tall) on a 50-60% slope.

At 1845 the sawyer from 1644 completed a cut on a large stem of gambel oak and it began to fall towards him. The sawyer crouched to brace for impact, released his finger from the throttle, and placed the chainsaw with the bar pointing to his left on the ground uphill. The swamper, just below and to the left noticed the falling oak, and in an attempt to protect the sawyer, stepped uphill and reached to deflect the brush. In the motion the swamper's right leg came into contact with the chainsaw on the ground. The slowing chain caught the swamper in the right leg just below the knee resulting in a 2" laceration.

Initial medical aid was administered at the scene and it was determined that the swamper needed to be transported to the nearest hospital for further medical care. The injured party could walk and was escorted to the road to tie in with Division 14. Severity of the injury and condition of the individual did not warrant an ambulance for transportation. It was determined the fastest mode of transport would be to utilize a Moffat County Deputy vehicle to drive directly to Pioneers Hospital in Meeker, CO; twenty five minutes away. Ordering an ambulance to the scene for transport would have taken approximately 1 hour 15 minutes for arrival, loading and return to Meeker, CO. To have ordered an ambulance from Craig, CO would have taken closer to 90 minutes.

Division 14 contacted Craig Dispatch and informed them of the medical transport actions and could they call a BLM employee in Meeker to meet them at Pioneers Hospital. At 1924 the injured party arrived at the hospital and the laceration was cleaned and nine stitches were required. The individual returned to duty the next day.

From the time of the injury to arrival of the injured individual at the hospital was less than 45 minutes.

Contributory Information:

In accordance with Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations (Red Book), Chapter 18 Reviews and Investigations, a Wildfire Accident investigation is being conducted at this time. Within 45 days of this accident, a final report detailing the accident to include facts, findings, and recommendations shall be submitted to the BLM Colorado State FMO.

Wildfire Accident Investigation Team members included:

Team Leader – Garner Harris, SZ FMO - NW Colorado Fire Management Unit (BLM)

Subject Matter Expert - Chainsaw Operations – Josh Graham, Upper Colorado River Fire (USFS)

Chief Investigator / Safety Manager – COSO State Safety & Occupational Health Manager

Fuels:

Pinion-juniper, sagebrush, gambel oak, and various grasses.

Weather:

Weather conditions during the afternoon of initial attack were; temperatures of 82-86 degrees, relative humidity of 9-12%, west/northwest winds 8-10 mph, with occasional gusts to 15 mph, and clear skies.

