



## **Gun Shots Fired upon Firefighters During Routine Patrol**

On September 26, 2009, two firefighters from Western Lane District were doing a routine patrol in a forested area west of Cottage Grove. The firefighters were driving a 2006 Type 6 fire engine which is a flat bed with a 300 gallon tank and red lights on top. As the firefighters were driving up a dead end gravel road, five miles off the main paved road, they heard a pop sound. They immediately stopped the engine thinking maybe they had an issue with one of the tires. Both the driver and the passenger got out of the engine to check tires and began walking around the engine. The wind was howling through the area, which was a ridge top in a recently completed clear-cut, making it difficult to hear sounds. As the driver stood up to move to the opposite side of the engine to check the tires, she heard another pop sound and a banging sound at the truck. Looking toward the engine she saw the hole in the windshield. She yelled to her passenger to get into the engine because they were being shot at.

As they jumped into the engine they heard another shot. The driver told her passenger to get down as she started the engine and with some difficulty she quickly got the manual transmission into reverse. Getting as low as she could herself and still see, she backed the engine 50 feet to a good turn-a-round spot that she had noticed on their way in. She got the engine turned around and headed out the direction they came in from. Both firefighters said they heard one more shot and a bullet fly pass the engine.

Not knowing if they would be followed they quickly drove down the steep gravel road, still crouched down as low as they could and still drive. The driver later said that she kept the transmission in 2<sup>nd</sup> not wanting to risk going too fast and sliding off the road, especially if someone was chasing them. The passenger called the district dispatch by radio to notify the office that they had been shot at. They were instructed to drive to the safe location of a nearby rural fire station and wait for help.

The office called both state and county law enforcement. Both law agencies came and met the engine crew and their supervisor at the fire station and began the investigation. Because of the location of the gunshot hole in the windshield, the police officers began investigating the incident as attempted homicide.

After two intense hours of securing the scene and investigation, the police officers were able to determine where the shooter was standing. Lining that up with where the engine was stopped when it was hit, they found a target in between the shooter and the engine. The shooter was carelessly shooting at a target back toward the road with no back stop of any kind. Because of a slight rise in the road and heavy grass and brush between the target and the road, the shooter most likely never even knew the engine was there.

Western Lane's Engine Crew did everything correctly when faced with this incident. They retreated from the scene as quickly as they could in a controlled manner. Once shots were

identified, leaving immediately without trying to investigate the scene was the safest and smartest action to take. The driver was aware of her surroundings and knew right where to turn around. She also maintained control of the vehicle while driving down a steep and dangerous gravel road.

At this time of year when firearm use is at a maximum and fire danger still requires our presence in the forest, it is important to remind firefighters and all forest workers of the potential dangers they may encounter when doing their job. Know your surroundings as you drive into remote areas. Look for turn-a-round locations and know your escape routes. If faced with gunfire in your direction don't stick around to investigate, but don't panic either. Instead keep your head and retreat quickly and under control. Finally, stay in communication and notify law enforcement when you come across careless actions involving firearms.

