

**Las Conchas Fire – Division India Near-Miss
After-Action-Review NOTES
7-9-2011**

AAR Participants:

- Engine Type 6 with staff of 4 (Engine 2 in the AAR)
- Engine Type 6 with staff of 3 (Engine 1 in the AAR)
- Interagency Hotshot crew
- Task Force Leader (TFLD)
- TFLD
- Division Supervisor (DIVS (T))

Narrative:

At 15:00, an Interagency Hotshot crew was burning a 300-footlong piece along an unnamed canyon road in order to fill in with black. This road had been prepared for a burnout operation earlier, and was to be burned around 18:00 this day. The wildfire had been backing down to this road for several days and had reached it in several places. Downdrafts from a nearby thunderstorm pushed strong and erratic winds into the area and the planned burnout had become a forced issue due to increasing winds.

Holding was assigned to Engine 1 and they were moving eastward with the Hotshot crew. Their safety zone was a large hard black area 300 feet in front of them to the east. The fire spotted across the line and fire on both sides of the road grew in intensity. In an effort to catch the spot fires across the line and knock down the burnout, the TFLD called for Engine 2 to assist and they drove in, heading west. They were briefed by the hotshot crew at the east end of this 300 foot piece of green that it was hot ahead of them and that their safety zone was the hard black at each end of the canyon.

Engine 2 did not know what apparatus was ahead of them or that a burnout operation was in progress. They were responding to control a spot fire when smoke and dust obscured their vision. Hearing of the spot fires over the radio, the DIVS(T) asked for two other engines to stage at each end of the canyon. During the effort to control the spot fire across the road, Engine 1 was heading east and Engine 2 was heading west. A third engine had also moved in behind Engine 2 and the entire crew of the third engine was out of the engine working spot fires. Engine 2 was met head on by Engine 1 between two safety zones at a spot on the road with no turnouts. Engine 2 was blocked by Engine 1 from moving forward and blocked from moving backward by the empty third engine. They had no place to go with the fire increasing in intensity.

The Captain on Engine 2 told his rookie fire fighter to get back into the engine and the Captain got out to protect the engine. It was at this point that he felt the radiant heat on the left side of his face and experienced smoke inhalation.

Narrative Summary: (From Engine 1)

While holding line, my engine, heading east, moved to hit a spot fire on the green side. Fire intensity was picking up due to a thunderstorm in the area and gusty-erratic winds.

"In a matter of seconds (we) started getting heavy smoke and a lot of fire and heat on both sides."

My crew started rolling hose. A crewmember, with a history of nose bleeds, developed a nosebleed at this time. My engine was trying to exit the canyon when we came head on to Engine 2. A third engine, facing east, was behind Engine 2.

Narrative Summary: (From Engine 2)

At 14:40, the engine captain dismounted to cool down the fire edge.

"Within 10 minutes the fire ahead became too intense and Engine 1 pulled out and headed straight toward our engine head on."

A third engine was behind our engine and their crew was out working spot fires. Once the crew was back in the third engine they began exiting the canyon. Our engine began backing up with Engine 1 following. At a wide spot in the road, my engine pulled over and Engine 1 exited the canyon and met up with the line medics for the nosebleed and their other firefighter who had suffered from smoke inhalation because the window was rolled down.

"At 15:00 my engine was able to turn around and exit the canyon."

Injuries:

Engine 2 Captain experienced a sunburn like sensation on his left ear and face and smoke inhalation, which developed into a cough. He was seen by line medics who referred him to the hospital. He then drove himself to the hospital emergency room with the line paramedic following in a separate vehicle. He was treated and released and returned to work.

Two days later, Engine 2 Captain was taken to a second hospital for a second evaluation because his cough persisted. He was seen in the emergency room and was referred to the UNMH burn center where he was evaluated and released back to work.

The Firefighter on Engine 1, with the history of nosebleeds, was treated by line medics and released. It was felt that the nosebleeds were not related to the fire. The second fire fighter on Engine 1 with smoke inhalation was treated by line medics and released.

Vehicle/Property Damage:



Engine 2- deformed mirror caused by radiant heat



Engine 2 - delaminated decal



Engine 1 - deformed passenger side mirror caused by radiant heat



Engine 1 - bubbled ice chest



Engine 1- ember landed on instrument panel

Lessons Learned:

- The control of one-lane roads is critical. Ensure that all units know the direction of travel, and all the apparatus involved in the operation.
- One person needs to be in charge of holding forces and one person in charge of burning. The comment was made that there were, "too many bosses".
- Better communication with all resources, Engine 2 stated they did not know that there was a burnout in progress or that a holding engine was ahead of them but the Hotshots did advise them it was very hot up the canyon and where the safety zones were. Engine 2 was responding to control a spot fire.
- A clear line of supervision needs to be established. If an engine is called in to deal with a spot fire, who are they working for, the TFLD or the crew doing the burnout, the burn boss or the holding boss?
- Safety versus mission focus. Everyone had their head down and was focused on controlling spot fires. Take the time for a safety briefing, escape routes and all resources involved in the operation.
- During burnout operations and spot fire control engines need to stay mobile. The engine operator should stay with the vehicle while on the roadway.
- Briefings should stress more the condition of the fuels. TFLD stated he only remembered hearing one time at briefings that the 1000-hour fuels were at extremely low fuel moistures.
- TFLD never knew anyone had suffered smoke inhalation or a fire fighter had a nosebleed or that engines were damaged. The radio traffic did not indicate

any kind of emergency. Engine 1 and Engine 2 stated they never announced any kind of emergency over the radio.

- Trust in others, like a hotshot crew, cannot be allowed to overcome your gut feeling that things are not right or that you need more information.
- Successful burnout operations day after day can lead to complacency.
- Engines were not aware that fire had been put on the ground at both ends of that 300-foot piece of line.
- Crews need to understand the limit of engine ingress and egress and consider that when they brief incoming engine crews.
- The TFLD and DIV(T) both felt they should have provided closer supervision to this burnout operation. Someone not involved in the work needs to focus on the larger picture.
- Keep windows rolled up to protect the interior of the cab and maintain a better atmosphere in the cab.

Additional Recommendations:

- Ensure that all parties involved in the fire have a clear understanding of the Burn Injury Protocol which is reflected clearly in the Incident Management Team's "Incident Emergency Plan".