

# Rapid Lesson Sharing

**Event Type:** Drone Interferes with Initial Attack

**Date:** July 12, 2015

**Location:** San Bernardino National Forest; California



***At that moment, emergency traffic airs over command frequency that all aircraft have been grounded due to a drone sighted in the fire area.***



*[This is not the drone that was involved in this initial attack incident.]*

## **NARRATIVE**

At approximately 1430 hours, a report is radioed to Dispatch of a 1/4-acre vegetation fire located directly behind our Mill Creek Fire Station. Stepping outside the office, my swamper and I see heavy smoke to the north of the compound. We quickly make our way to the transport to off-load the dozer and engage the fire. Upon size-up of the rapid rate-of-spread and eliminating the option of anchoring at the heel and cutting direct due to steepness of terrain, I prioritize my tactics to protection of life and property. I then make a decision to track my dozer up an indirect route—knowing there are homes and property owners at risk at the top of the ridge in the fire’s path.

***At this time, the only option I have is to hope the fire will crest the ridge and minimize in intensity long enough for me to cross the drainage to the homes.***



***This is the incident, the Mill 2 Fire, in which a drone interferes with aircraft and hampers IA efforts.***

At this point, one ridge to my north separates the ridge I am tracking up and the main fire. Air resources are enroute. At the pace I am ascending the ridge, I figure the air resources will arrive on scene and slow the forward rate-of-spread down long enough to allow me to reach the homes.

### **Fire Advances Toward Homes**

As I crest the ridge, I only have a shallow drainage to cross—in which the fire has established itself just below me and is making a strong push toward the homes. At that moment, emergency traffic airs over command frequency that all aircraft have been grounded due to a drone sighted in the fire area.

As the fire advances, I make eye contact with the property owner across the drainage. At this time, the only option I have is to hope the fire will crest the ridge and minimize in intensity long enough for me to cross the drainage to the homes.

IF YOU FLY,  
WE CAN'T



DRONES NEAR WILDFIRES ARE NOT SAFE

FLYING DRONES OR UAS (UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS) WITHIN OR NEAR WILDFIRES WITHOUT PERMISSION COULD CAUSE INJURY OR DEATH TO FIREFIGHTERS AND HAMPER THEIR ABILITY TO PROTECT LIVES, PROPERTY, AND NATURAL CULTURAL RESOURCES

FIREFIGHTERS MAY SUSPEND AERIAL FIREFIGHTING UNTIL UNAUTHORIZED UAS LEAVE THE AREA, ALLOWING WILDFIRE TO GROW LARGER.

CONTACT YOUR NEAREST LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCY OFFICE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT UAS AND PUBLIC LANDS



***When the drone is spotted returning, a U.S. Forest Service employee is able to follow it and confront the person responsible.***

I take a moment to size-up and reevaluate my escape route and safety zone and try to develop a contingency plan with my swamper.

#### **Drone Operator Confronted**

Fortunately, the fire does as I had hoped. My swamper and I are able to cross the drainage and engage the fire directly, assisting the crews and engine personnel behind the threatened homes. Next, the drone clears the area and air suppression resources reengage.

When the drone is spotted returning, a U.S. Forest Service employee is able to follow it and confront the person responsible. His vehicle information is documented and he is notified that the authorities are enroute to educate him on drone use in wildfire areas.

However, the drone operator refuses to wait and flees the scene.

For more information on Drone Awareness, see this National Interagency Fire Center website:

<http://www.nifc.gov/drones/>

### LESSONS

With the recent high frequency of drone use affecting wildfire suppression tactics, this incident has raised my awareness to the impact that drones have on wildfire suppression tactics.

In the future I plan on being more cautious when implementing air support into my tactical decisions and suppression efforts.

**This RLS was submitted by:**

**Dozer Operator**

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