Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Vehicle Collision During Initial Response to Fire

Date: July 21, 2017

Location: Martin Fire
South Dakota

Initial Response;

Dust;

and an

Unintended Outcome

Looking north along the gravel county road. Note the small hill in background which restricted the approaching crew convoy vehicles from seeing the gated access point where the POV was partially obstructing the road.

NARRATIVE

The Martin Fire was discovered on July 21 at approximately 1450 hours. Initial size-up provided by a recon flight indicated a moderate to high spread potential. Response from local interagency Dispatch included Type 6 Engines, aircraft, and an interagency Type 2 Initial Attack Crew composed of crewmembers from several different agencies.

This interagency IA Crew was traveling with a local District AFMO south along a gravel county road toward the fire's location. The crew convoy consisted of four agency-owned ¾ ton vehicles. Heavy dust from the traffic on the recently re-graveled road was noticeably reducing visibility for these vehicles in-route to the fire.

ABOVE – Vehicle 2 and Vehicle 3 after the collision.
BELOW – Vehicle 4 damage.

Parked POV Creates Roadside Obstacle

The District AFMO, traveling south, crested over a hill—which restricted seeing the gated access point located on the west side of this gravel road.

The District AFMO noticed a privately owned vehicle (POV) that had been parked there to open the access gate alongside the main county road. The way the POV was positioned created a roadside obstacle.

A northbound local VFD Type 6 Engine, followed by a water tender, were also waiting to turn onto the access road. These vehicles were facing the approaching southbound crew vehicles.

Upon seeing these vehicles, the District AFMO alerts via radio: *"Shut it down—vehicles in the road."*

Vehicle 3 then crests the hill and enters a large cloud of gravel dust that significantly reduces driver visibility.

Vehicles Collide; Vehicle 3's Airbags Deploy

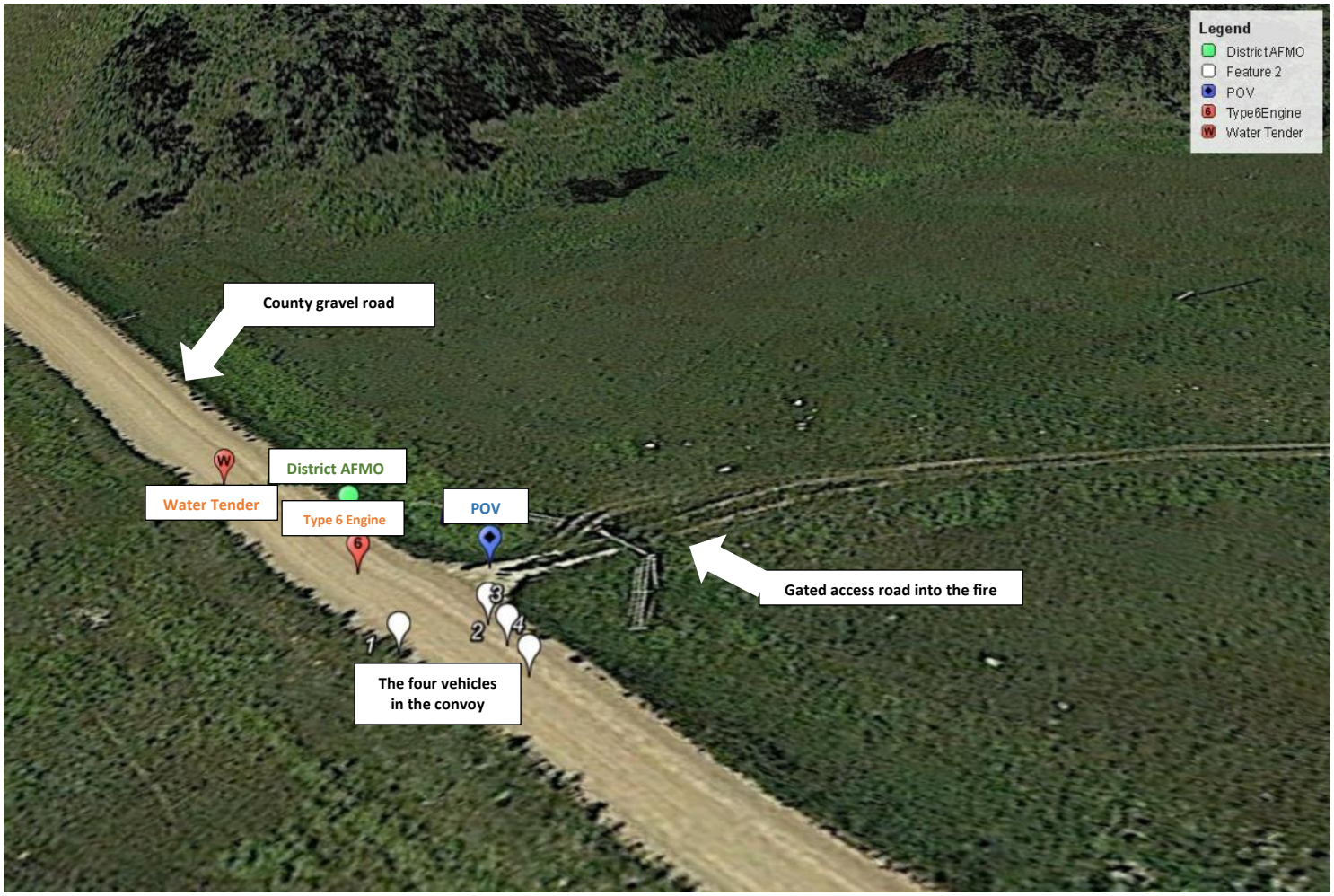
The Crew Boss in Vehicle 1 (of this four-vehicle crew convoy) hears the radio warning about these vehicles in the road. After cresting the hill and seeing this traffic congestion, the Crew Boss applies the brakes and navigates to the left side (south bound) of the road.

The Crew Boss' vehicle stays on the road and manages to avoid the POV at the gate, as well as the Type 6 Engine. Vehicle 2 of the crew convoy applies the brakes, fishtails, and avoids Vehicle 1 and the POV truck, and stops on the right side of the road.

Vehicle 3 then crests the hill and enters a large cloud of gravel dust that significantly reduces driver visibility.

The driver hears the radio traffic warning of the vehicle congestion and applies the brakes. Still unable to see any vehicles due to the large dust cloud, Vehicle 3 slides and is unable to avoid a rear-end collision with Vehicle 2. Vehicle 3's airbags are deployed.

Vehicle 4 also hears the warning of congestion and slows—but, similarly to Vehicle 3, enters the large cloud of gravel dust and has very limited visibility of the road. The driver is finally able to make out vehicles and quickly decides to remain on the right side of the road to avoid fully contacting the Crew Boss' vehicle. Instead, Vehicle 4 collides with the driver's-side corner of Vehicle 3, damaging Vehicle 4's passenger-side front bumper and front quarter panel.



Patient Triage Begins; Incident Within an Incident Declared

After this vehicle collision incident, the Crew Boss and the local VFD Type 6 Engine both relay to their respective dispatch centers (the crew through the interagency Dispatch Center and the Type 6 Engine through the County 911 system) that an accident has occurred and request ambulances.

The interagency crew has a Paramedic and three EMTs. The Paramedic begins patient triage with assistance from the other EMTs on the crew. The District AFMO is now joined by a second AFMO. The District AFMO relays the accident information to the District Duty Officer. An Incident Within an Incident (IWI) is declared.

The Duty Officer requests the District AFMO to utilize the Medical Incident Report to relay pertinent injury information to the interagency Dispatch Center.

Six crewmembers were transported by local EMS to the hospital for medical evaluation and observation. At this point the IWI was cleared. The patients were met at the hospital by the Forest Safety Officer and then by the District Ranger and the Deputy Forest Supervisor.

All six crewmembers were released that evening.

The Forest and District Duty Officers were able to contact all agency representatives of the injured crew who were transported to the medical facility, providing notification of this incident in a timely fashion. In fact, many of these people were notified before the patients reached the hospital.

Of the three vehicles involved in the collision, only Vehicle 2's airbags deployed. All three vehicles sustained damage and are un-drivable.

LESSONS

What Went Well?

- The interagency partners who were contacted for this RLS were very pleased and supportive of how the incident was handled by both on-scene resources and the Supervisor's Office, District staff, the interagency Dispatch Center, and County 911 Dispatch.
- The prompt response of EMS and crewmembers that put patient care first.
- The IA Crew consisted of an effective balance of EMS members (three EMTs and one Paramedic) who were able to facilitate patient triage and monitor patient status while awaiting transport.
- The IA Crew maintained focus, calmness, and professionalism throughout the IWI.
- The Supervisor's Office and District communication and cooperation led to the immediate notification of interagency cooperators and the prompt assistance for the patients at local hospital.

Recommendations for Improvement

- Freshly graveled roads can create significant dust resulting in near-zero visibility on roads. Reduce speeds and increase travel distance between vehicles.
- Work quickly to establish command and control of incident to help control the flow of information. Once an incident has occurred, the demand for information from on-scene resources can be very challenging.
- Who Do I Talk To? Medical Incident Report call-in: Who is a more appropriate contact point in a fast-moving incident? Forest guidance indicates contact to be made with interagency Dispatch Center. Is going direct to local 911 the better option for EMS requests?

- Medical Incident Report call-in criteria: Develop a minimum of “critical” or high-priority information necessary within the Medical Incident Report. This may assist with fast moving/mass casualty incidents.
- Stopped emergency vehicles and fire trucks on main roadway should turn on and use emergency/hazard lights as a warning to oncoming vehicles. It is believed this type of warning could have been seen through the dust to prevent—or at least reduce—the potential for an accident.
- Confusion on e-Safety/CA-1 initiation for interagency fire crews. Crew Boss of interagency fire crews need to discuss medical claim processes with members.
- Provide hospital liaison training to personnel who may be assigned this task for injured employees.
- Consider identifying a point of contact for crew who, if possible, can accompany injured crewmembers to the hospital.

This RLS was submitted by:

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