

One-Page Summary

Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center

This is an excerpt from the 11-page *Rock Creek Prescribed Fire Deployment FLA Report*. It is intended to provide an overview of events and a sample of the numerous lessons captured in the original report. For the complete report, please click on this link:

http://wildfirelessons.net/documents/Rock_Creek_RX_Entrapment_FLA.pdf

Rock Creek Prescribed Fire Entrapment FLA

The burn progressed normally until about 14:00 when members of the crew noticed a change in wind speed coming from the north and a dramatic increase in fire activity with jackpots of fuel showing extreme behavior with torching of individual trees.

Crew Member#1 was making his way from an area of very heavy fuel accumulation west of the green belt to the east where he remembered his escape route.

At the head of the green belt, it became obvious to Crew Member #1 that he was entrapped and that trees were flaring around him. The heat was growing intense and the smoke was choking and reduced visibility to only the immediate area.

Crew Member# 1 tried to remove his fire shelter from the bag but had trouble finding the flap. He removed his web gear to get the shelter out and got the shelter out of the bag, but couldn't get it fully deployed with his gloves on.



He removed his right glove, tried to shake out the shelter with fire and wind around him. He deployed the shelter on unburned leaf litter and got inside without his web gear and his right glove. His drip torch was next to him along with his web gear. His hard hat was on in the shelter but fell off when exiting the shelter.

Within less than a minute, he noticed that fire was inside the shelter burning the leaf litter on which the shelter was deployed. At this point, the burns to his face likely occurred. He abandoned the shelter. By this time, the flaring hardwood crowns had quieted and some of the flaming front had passed.

Disoriented from the smoke and confusion of an altered landscape, he heard the vehicle horn being sounded by the Burn Boss and ran south and then east to Road 207. He emerged on Road 207, a distance from the deployment site of about 300 feet, a short distance from where he entered the harvest unit but south of it.

Some of the Lessons from the Report

- ***"There is not a wildfire and a prescribed fire: fire is fire."*** (Burn Boss of Rock Creek Prescribed Fire.) Because prescribed burning was a common work activity, all crew members said they had become complacent. One crew member described their thinking before the incident: *"We weren't on a fire, we were burning."* With hindsight, the fire boss shares a lesson learned that: *"On a wildfire you show up respecting it. On a prescribed fire, something's going to happen before you respect it"* and that mindset has to change.
- **The Firing Boss needs to closely monitor their geographic span of control as it relates to communications with their crew, especially those farther from their safety zone.**
- **Establish LCES and consider it a moving target on a prescribed burn.**