

Prescribed Fire February, 2004 Injury Incidents

There are some rumors starting to go around about some prescribed fire injuries in Florida. One national website had a posting yesterday talking about 2 different burnovers on prescribed fires in Florida. That was incorrect. One was not a "burnover". Anyway I wanted to give you the facts as we know them right now in case you hear more rumors, are asked by employees, etc.

1st Incident was on a Nature Conservancy Burn on the Rock Hill tract near Chipley on Feb 18. A PFTC crew was helping TNC conduct the burn. When wind shifted some fire started hitting a line pretty hard in thick wiregrass. A TNC employee grabbed a lateral line on a hoselay along that line and tried to cool the flames down. Additional holding forces arrived and they held the fire within the original lines. The TNC employee received one spot of second-degree burns to his nose, and 2 spots of 3rd degree burns on his right hand. He did have gloves on and a face shroud. The burns were not from direct flame but from radiant heat. TNC has initiated a review of the incident and it is taking place today. Bruce Harvey is on the review team along with a TNC person, a USF&WS person and a DOF person.

2nd incident occurred on Feb. 24 on a Florida State DEP prescribed burn on St Sebastian Preserve in south Florida. 3 DEP employees were burned and are in hospital. A Humvee and ATV were also destroyed. One individual has 2nd degree burns on 38% of body. A second has 2nd degree burns on 20-30% of body. 3rd person had minor burns. A Critical Incident Stress Debriefing team is meeting with other employees who were involved in the incident. A joint DOF and DEP review started yesterday. A South Florida Water Mgmt employee is also on the review team as well as DEP law enforcement.

When I get anything official from the review teams I'll share with you and let you share with district employees.

Joe Ferguson
Fire Management Staff Officer
National Forests in Florida