

GREEN SHEET

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)

Preliminary Summary Report of Serious CAL FIRE Injuries, Illnesses, Accidents and Near-Miss Incidents



Vehicle Accident

September 10, 2012

Scotts Incident

CA-MEU-006376

California Northern Region

This Preliminary Summary Report is intended as an aid in accident prevention, and to provide factual information from the first 24 hours of the accident review. To that end it is published and distributed within a short time frame. Information contained within may be subject to revision as further investigation is conducted, and other reports and documents are received.

NARRATIVE

On Monday, September 10, 2012, at approximately 2040 hours, a private water tender assigned to the Scotts Fire was involved in a solo vehicle accident. The water tender was driving on a dirt road and left the road above a steep gully. The water tender went over an embankment and overturned. CAL FIRE personnel responded to the accident location where they found the water tender on the driver's side approximately 25 feet below the road. The accident resulted in minor injuries to the operator. The water tender sustained major damage.

CONDITIONS

- Location:** The Scotts wildland fire incident occurred on State Responsibility Area (SRA) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) property located approximately seven miles northwest of Clear Lake, Sonoma-Lake-Napa Unit. The accident site was located on an access road approximately .9-miles west of the intersection with Scotts Valley Road.
- Road Condition:** The road is generally steep, with pitches ranging up to 24%. It is surfaced with native material. Width ranges from 14-16 ft. with turnouts to permit vehicles to pass safely. The accident site is located outside of the fire perimeter on a curved segment of road. The inside of the curve at the accident site had been flagged in orange to alert vehicle operators and the flagging was visible in both directions. The road had been reduced to a single lane due to fill erosion.
- Traffic:** The road received heavy fire apparatus traffic during shift change. At the time of the accident, traffic was limited to utility vehicles and water tenders either watering the road or driving to an off-site location to refill water tanks.
- Topography:** The accident site is located at a mid slope position where the road crosses a drainage. Adjacent side slopes are steep, ranging from 50 to 80%.

Fuels: Fuel types along the road range from chamise chaparral to hardwoods. Vegetation at the accident site consisted of a dense stand of California bay trees.

Weather: Taken at the accident site at 2100 hours on 9-10-12

Temperature – 65 degrees Fahrenheit

Relative Humidity – 48 percent

Winds – Calm

Fire Equipment: Private hire 1971 Peterbilt, conventional cab, 3-axle, 2,000 gallon water tender.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

On Monday evening, September 10, 2012, Simpson Water Tender E-19 was working a 24-hr shift assigned to Division Yankee, Branch II, in support of fire suppression operations. Fire activity in Division Yankee was minimal, with operations consisting of line construction, mop-up and patrol. Water tenders assigned to Division Yankee were being used to support hose lays as well as road watering for dust abatement. The operator on Water Tender E-19 spent most of the day shift watering roads within the fire perimeter and along the Division Yankee access road.

At approximately 1830 hours, the relief driver took over as the operator for Water Tender E-19. He was provided with a safety briefing on the fire line by Division Yankee and was assigned to water the access road. The operator had completed some road watering and was driving down the access road to refuel the water tender at a location on Scotts Valley Road.

At approximately .9-miles from Scotts Valley Road, at the location of a watercourse crossing drained with a culvert, the road curved to the right. The road width narrowed to 12-14 ft. The road grade ranged from 12% approaching the turn to nearly level on the turn. As the driver approached the turn, he was talking on his cellular phone. As the front wheels of the water tender were at midpoint on the curve, the outside right rear duals were positioned on the edge of the embankment.

At some point the right rear duals left the roadway and the rear of the water tender began to slide off the embankment.

The water tender rolled over once and came to rest on the driver's side, angled down the slope, approximately 25 horizontal feet and 20 vertical feet from the roadway. The water tender was partially stabilized by standing and uprooted bay trees in the drainage.

The operator self-extricated from the water tender via the passenger-side door. A private equipment operator driving by in a utility stopped to render help and make radio notification of the accident. The operator involved in the accident was evaluated by a nearby Advanced Life support (ALS) Medic Unit assigned to the incident and later transported to a local area hospital for observation.

SAFETY ISSUES FOR REVIEW

- Drivers should maintain situational awareness at all times while operating a vehicle and be aware of changing road conditions such as narrow, sloped or unfamiliar roads.
- Know the size and other limitations of your vehicle.

INCIDENTAL ISSUES/LESSONS LEARNED

- Mobile communication and navigation devices can distract drivers and is a common factor in vehicle accidents.