

# TRINITY RIDGE FIRE - FLA

## *FALLING ASLEEP WHILE DRIVING*

*Boise National Forest – September 1, 2012*

### The Story

The Trinity Ridge fire is located on the Boise National Forest has been going on for almost a month. As is typical for this area the fire is burning in timber and the terrain is mountainous with inversions capping heavy smoke down into all low lying areas.

Line Safety Clint had been working his assigned divisions for 9 days. Half of the day is spent working in a lot of smoke until the inversion lifts later in the day. At least this is what he thinks caused him to come down with the crud about 5 days into his assignment. After consulting with Medical, he took some nighttime cold medication and tried to sleep. He woke up in the morning not feeling any better but not feeling any worse. Clint decided to take the cold medication again the next night.

The following day he wakes up feeling almost normal and after briefing begins his rounds on the line, checking in with firefighters and looking over his assigned divisions. Clint decides to drive out to a road block that he has not been to before. The drive turns out to be a bit longer than he

expected – approximately 11 miles out. After finding the location of the road block he turns around to return to the fireline. Around 10:45, ¾ of the way back, without warning, Clint feels very sleepy. It is an immediate change that he cannot attribute to any one thing. Is it the cold medication? The warm sun shining on him? The long straight road he is slowly driving? Or is it everything combined?

Clint isn't quite sure why he feels so drowsy but he takes a quick look at his GPS and notes there is a campground about a half a mile ahead of him. Clint hesitates to pull over because it feels like an awkward spot and he might be in the way of fire traffic on the road or it might look bad that Safety is pulled off the edge of the road taking a nap in plain sight. He decides to go to the campground and park his vehicle for a bit and stretch his legs. Clint's concept of time in the next few moments becomes a series of swift events even though the actual speed of the vehicle is pretty slow (about 25mph).

The next thing Clint recalls is jerking awake as the vehicle drifts off the road. He quickly jerks the steering wheel to get the vehicle back on the road but is too late. Glass suddenly materializes all over him, tree limbs smash and go flying by and the vehicle comes to a slow stop. Clint quietly looks around and checks himself for blood or broken bones. Once he feels everything is all right he gets out of the vehicle and calmly radios back to ICP that there had been an accident but no injuries.





## Lessons Learned from Clint

1. As soon as you feel sleepy while driving pull over. Do not hesitate. Do not try to find a convenient location. As long as it is safe to do so, pull over and do something to make yourself more alert.
2. Be aware of how your body responds to medications. Something you might be comfortable taking at home when you don't feel good might affect you differently during a fire assignment.
3. The nature of your work on a fire assignment affects your body differently than when at home performing normal duties. Cumulative effects of the environmental conditions, long duty days, and physical responses can all line up like the holes in the swiss cheese model. Make sure you pay attention to your body. Don't be complacent with warning signs.

## Facilitative Learning Analysis

*To learn more information about this process go to:*

*<http://wildfirelessons.net/OrgLearning.aspx>*

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