



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

In Reply Refer To:
9210
(UT-020)

July 10, 2006

To: Glenn Carpenter Salt Lake Field Office Manager and Acting Associate State Director

Subject: Expanded (72 hour) Report for Scorpio Fire Entrapment

The following report is the Expanded 72 Hour Report for the incident involving two fire fighters entrapped during burnout operations on the Scorpio Fire. This report contains information from the preliminary report previously given on the NFES 0869 as well as additional details regarding the incident. This report is a preliminary report and is subject to change. The final report will follow within 45 days.

Personnel entrapped on the Scorpio Fire

Crew Member No. 1 – Shelter was deployed, injury was a second degree burn to left arm/elbow
Crew Member No. 2– Entrapped on fire, no shelter deployment, no injuries

Introduction

On June 30, 2006 two firefighters from the BLM Salt Lake Helitack Crew were entrapped while conducting a backfire operation on the Scorpio Fire in the Hog Up Mountains, Box Elder County, Utah. One member of the crew felt it necessary to deploy his shelter for protection and the other sought refuge in a wash from the smoke and embers. The crewmember that deployed his shelter was treated for a second degree burn on his left elbow.

The Scorpio Fire was under the jurisdiction of the Salt Lake Field Office, Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The Salt Lake Field Office in conjunction with the Utah State Office initiated the investigation regarding the entrapment. The investigation team collected information from a site visit, data collected, and individual interviews with personnel involved with the incident.

Narrative

Salt Lake Helitack was dispatched to the Scorpio fire on the afternoon of June 30th with 4 crew members and pilot on board helicopter 1BH. The crew arrived at the advancing fire front, flying from a southern direction and continued north over the fire to the heel. The Crew estimated the fire to be over 1,000 acres at that time. Upon arrival, the fire was noted to be making a good run

from the northeast to the southwest. 1BH sat down on the northeast end of the fire, dropping off two crewmembers which initiated a backfire from the road. Helicopter 1BH then proceeded with the remaining crewmembers to the heel of the fire where they tied in with engines from the Volunteer Fire Department. One crewmember, an ICT4 trainee stayed with the volunteer engines to direct and assist the activities at the heel and west flank of the fire while the ICT4 on the fire stayed with helicopter 1BH to continue the recon.

At approximately 18:00 hours additional resources from the BLM Salt Lake Field Office arrived on scene at the north end of the fire to aid in suppression activities. At this time the fire began to exhibit extreme fire behavior as a result of strong downdraft winds associated with a thunder cell tracking over the fire. Firing operations were compromised due to the changing weather conditions. Upon arrival, Engine 438 was sent along the east flank in order to aid with the backfire, but was unable to reach the two helitack crewmembers because of the extreme fire behavior and lack of visibility. The crewmembers conducting backfire operations on the east flank experienced a strong wind shift that carried the fire across the road. Firing operations were suspended and the two crewmembers tried to rendezvous in the black. Due to high wind conditions and reduced visibility, they were unable to meet. Because of the extreme fire behavior, one crewmember took shelter in a small wash within the black and endured the event with his pack turned into the wind and shroud in place. The other crewmember deployed his shelter beside the road in a narrow strip of black created from the firing operation. While in the shelter, the crewmember received a burn on his left elbow.

As the front passed, the two helicopter crewmembers located each other and were joined by Engine 438 at the shelter deployment site. At this time the type III IC arrived on scene and ordered all resources to gather at the heel of the fire.

Preliminary factual findings

The following findings were noted as contributing factors leading up to and determining the outcome of the entrapment on the Scorpio Fire. These findings will be discussed in detail within the Final Report.

- Inadequate weather information obtained and distributed during suppression activities
- Incomplete briefing
- LCES not in place
- Ineffective use of resources
- Overhead engaging in suppression activities neglected primary oversight duties
- Fire experienced extreme wind event from passing thunder cell
- Effective use of shelter training and PPE during deployment

Investigation Team

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