

# Firefighter Chainsaw Injury on Bullards Fire North San Juan, Tahoe NF

## Facilitated Learning Analysis



**Subject:** Firefighter impacted by dawgs while hiking with the chainsaw, cut above right elbow on Bullards Fire, Camptonville, CA.

**Accident Date:** 9/03/2010 at 13:15 on Division C of the Bullards Fire, Tahoe National Forest. While crossing a drainage while carrying the chainsaw, the individual lost their footing, the saw slid off their shoulder and punctured their right arm just above the elbow.

**Summary:** The drainage where the fall occurred had previous water erosion: steep embankments in places and very firm compacted dirt. The firefighter had spent the previous several days on similar terrain, moving freely without incident. At approximately 13:15, the firefighter was called to a smoking "cigar" (8" dbh, 15 ft tall section of tree trunk with heat in the top) in the upper third of the grid, approximately 200 ft interior. While walking down to the cigar, the firefighter began crossing the drainage. As they were entering the bottom, the dirt became very firm and the firefighters feet slid out from under them. The saw came off their shoulder, and although the sheath was on and their sleeves rolled down, the dawgs were still able to puncture their arm. The dawgs penetrated above the elbow and the momentum of the saw tore a 3 in gash in their arm. The firefighters Nomex shirt remained fully intact, showing no sign of ripping or tearing. The firefighter then hiked down to the burning tree where they tied in with another crewmember and Squad Boss. When the firefighter reported their fall the Squad Boss requested to see the injury. A laceration was observed, bleeding was minimal, some fatty tissue was exposed. The Superintendent was notified and the firefighter was sent to the road to tie in with a crew EMT. First aid was applied, the IC was notified, and the firefighter was

transported to the hospital with the EMT in a government vehicle. The firefighter received 10 stitches and was released to full duty the following day.

### **Time Table:**

- 0800 IHC attended briefing and received assignment
- 0930 Vehicles parked, IHC began gridding lower line on Div C. Saw positioned on high end, furthest off the road.
- 1000-1245 Multiple smokes mopped up.
- 1315 Firefighter slips while hiking, saw dawgs puncture arm.
- 1330 Firefighter receives 1<sup>st</sup> aid and awaits ground transport
- 1345 Firefighter en route to hospital
- 1430 Firefighter arrives Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital, Grass Valley, CA
- 1700 Firefighter receives 10 stitches
- 2000 Firefighter back with crew

### **Lessons Learned From the Participants and Facilitators**

- Ensure chainsaw is properly sheathed. Take the time to wrap the heavy nylon around the dawgs. The leather flaps on the sheath do cover the bulk of the dawgs, but the terminal points are still exposed.
- When in areas of unsure footing, remove the chainsaw from the shoulder and carry it at your side
- It may be wise to position the chainsaw on the road during a grid. This way they have the most secure footing available and can hike up or down off the road when they are needed.



Photo of dawgs properly wrapped. Notice the leather flaps do not effectively cover the outermost dawgs.