

SDA Forest Service WO

File Code: 6730 Date: April 27, 2004

Route To:

Subject: Expanded (72-Hour) Briefing - Arkansas Interstate 40 Incident - April 24, 2004

To: Agency DASHO

THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION IS PRELIMINARY AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Deceased Firefighter: Alan Toepke

Injured Firefighter: Vance Hazelton

**Preliminary Factual Findings:** The crew was returning from a fire assignment. The crew had stopped for the night and was residing in a hotel adjacent to Interstate 40. The accident occurred approximately 12:00 midnight (per Arkansas State Police Report). Visibility was reduced because of rain and darkness. Three crewmembers were attempting to cross Interstate 40. Two crewmembers were struck by an 18-wheel, semi-truck. One sustained serious injuries; one was fatally injured. The injured firefighter is in serious but stable condition at a local Memphis, Tennessee hospital. The three crewmember's destination was to a restaurant/bar on the opposite side of the interstate to check for fellow crewmembers. Alcohol was consumed by some crewmembers after they checked into the hotel and were off shift.

**Narrative:** One firefighter was killed and another severely injured in an accident that occurred while the Midewin Interagency Hotshot Crew was returning to the Midewin Tallgrass Prairie, their home unit in Wilmington, Illinois. The crew was demobilized from the East Fork Fire on the Apalachicola National Forest near Tallahassee, Florida on Thursday, April 22, 2004. They began the drive home on the following day. On Friday morning, the crew left Tallahassee at 0800 and drove until 1730 when they stopped for the night in West Memphis, Arkansas. The accident occurred at 12:00 a.m. (per Arkansas State Police Report) on Saturday, April 24, 2004, in West Memphis, Arkansas. Alan Toepke, 30, was

killed and Vance Hazelton, 30, was injured and remains hospitalized in Memphis, Tennessee.

They were attempting to cross U.S. Interstate 40 on foot near the hotel where they were staying. At the time of the accident, visibility was reduced because of rain and darkness. Their destination was a restaurant/bar on the opposite side of the interstate to look for fellow crewmembers. On Saturday, April 24, 2004, the remainder of the crew was moved to another location away from the accident site and was flown home on Sunday afternoon. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) is underway and ongoing. The Arkansas State Police conducted investigation of the accident site and a report was provided. A Forest Service Special Agent arrived at the incident site on Saturday morning by 0900 and began gathering preliminary information. A Forest Service Serious Accident Investigation Team arrived in West Memphis, Arkansas on Sunday, April 25, 2004, to investigate the accident.

/s/Jimmy L. Reaves

JIMMY L. REAVES  
Team Leader