

# Lessons Learned

## Icy Road vs. Forest Service Vehicle, Equals Rollover



**Incident Date:** January 14, 2010

**Note: This Motor Vehicle Accident was reviewed using the June 2009 updated Facilitated Learning Analysis Implementation Guide as an option to an AAR or Serious Accident Investigation.**

### **Narrative:**

Forest Service Employee, working for the Supervisors Office, Lassen National Forest was involved in a single Motor Vehicle Accident (MVA). Vehicle was a full size Chevrolet 4X4 Truck.

This accident occurred on January 14, 2010, at approximately 0930 hours. Employee was traveling Westbound on Highway 36 approximately twelve (12) miles west of Susanville California, in Lassen County.

The accident was a result of the vehicle hitting a large patch (three highway travel lanes wide and about two hundred yards long) of icy road. Highway 36 at this location was covered from side to side with ice.

The vehicle hit the icy patch at approximately 35-40 miles per hour (MPH). Speed limit on Highway 36 is 55 MPH.

The vehicle went into a left hand spin and 270 degrees later was backing across the highway, across oncoming traffic, into the embankment on the opposite side of the highway. Vehicle maintained its speed of 35-40 miles per hour during the spin.

At the location where the vehicle hit the embankment (on the opposite side of the highway) with its rear wheels and bumper, the vehicle flipped end over (180 degrees) landed on the top of the truck cab, and then continued its flip end over (another 180 degrees) and continued to slide into/onto a tree at the bottom of the ravine (about 60 yards), stopping the truck before it entered "Willard Creek".

Employee extracted themselves from the vehicle and climbed up the ravine to safety. Employee was met by an ambulance crew and a California Highway Patrolman on scene. Employee was transported by ambulance to "Banner Lassen Hospital" in Susanville CA. Employee was medically examined, treated for minor abrasions, and was released to return home where he was instructed to rest.

## **Now, for the rest of the story:**

You're wondering, how this employee had the MVA described and have so many people, to include an ambulance crew, a Highway Patrolman, and other rescue personnel available and able to assist him.

The FS Employee was not the only victim of that ICY PATCH OF ROAD. There were two (2) more victims that day, not to mention, within about a thirty minute time span. Originally I reported that the FS MVA accident was a part of a three (3) vehicle meet and greet. Not the case.

Approximately twenty (20) minutes before the Forest Service Truck (Vehicle #3) spun-out, Vehicle #1 (a full size Ford pick-up) spun-out on the very same patch of ice. Medical and Highway Patrol responded to accident #1.

While on scene, for Vehicle #1, accident #1, Vehicle #2 (another full size Ford pick-up) spun-out at the very same spot and had accident #2. So now medical and law enforcement are attending to Vehicle #1 & #2.

About 10 minutes later, here comes Vehicle #3 (our FS truck), spun-out and was the only vehicle that flipped (360 degrees) head over tails over the embankment and landed on its wheels, accident #3. Now everyone on scene responded to the needs and care of our FS Employee.

Along Willard Creek (location of accidents #1, #2, & #3) were three (3) full sized pick-ups waiting to be extracted. All the trucks were no more than 40 yards apart from each other. From one vantage point you could see all three trucks. It was a sight.

## **Contributing Factor:**

- It was a clear day, temperatures were in the middle 40's, but you couldn't see the ICE;
- Employee was capable of driving in cold weather and knew how to counter steer the vehicle, however when he felt the rear wheels start to slide he was not able to regain steering control;
- Vehicle was traveling at posted speed limit prior to approaching accident location, applying brakes to slow down caused the vehicle to spin and into a skid;
- Employee was wearing seatbelts;
- There were no loose items in the cab of the truck that could become projectiles;

## **Lesson(s) Learned and Recommendations from Facilitator:**

- Employee's must continue to wear seatbelts, they are the difference between serious and minor injuries;
- Employees must continue to keep all loose items in vehicle restrained and secure. We cannot allow items in the vehicles to become projectiles;
- Vehicle was traveling at posted speed limit, however, posted speed limits are not mandatory, we must drive for the condition we are exposed to;
- All employees need to be aware of road conditions, especially when freezing temperatures cause highways and surface roads to ICE over;

***“Drive Careful! ... And Wear Your Seat Belt, It makes a difference!”***