

Lessons Learned

Slick Road Rollover



Incident Date: November 5, 2009

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.

The Lessons Learned Analysis Options and FLA Guide are found at:

http://fswb.shastatrinity.r5.fs.fed.us/safety/AAA-FLA_Investigation_Guide-9-09.pdf

Narrative:

Two USFS vehicles left Redding, CA returning to the Six Rivers National Forest S.O. in Eureka at about 1:00pm traveling westbound on Highway 299 under cloudy skies in light rain, one of the first rains of the season. The section of road west of Whiskeytown NRA where this accident occurred is posted as a 55MPH zone with curves warning and a 35MPH speed advisory. A series of curves and an area of recent roadway re-alignment and new pavement had just been passed. The climb to Buckhorn Summit with greater drop-offs was still ahead.

The driver in the lead vehicle entered a right-hand curve and felt the rear tires start to slip. He recovered and looked in his rearview mirror in time to see the second vehicle, a Ford Ranger pickup with a lightly loaded tool box in the bed, begin to slide in the curve. He saw the rear end sliding around.

The second vehicle was traveling at about 40MPH entering the right-hand curve. He applied the brakes to slow down and felt the rear wheels slip. He steered into the curve, aiming at his intended direction, but the vehicle kept sliding sideways. He crossed the eastbound lane and left the roadway. He remembers beginning to roll when the wheels hit the gravel in a roadside turnout. "I was blessed there was no on-coming traffic." The vehicle made at least one complete roll as it went off the embankment, missing two trees and coming to rest upright by the creek.

Both vehicles had radios and the drivers had done a radio check before starting the trip. After a self assessment for injuries and checking for numbness, the driver in the rolled truck called the other driver to advise he was OK. He then self extricated himself and climbed up the embankment to the road. He reported still being somewhat dazed and that he almost walked onto the roadway with a semi coming. The other driver caught him and stopped him from walking onto the roadway.

Another USFS driver who was traveling on Highway 299 had earlier reported slick conditions resulting from the light rains. The Patrol Captain reported this being a common area for motor vehicle accidents, especially under wet conditions.

The Eureka to Redding round trip was planned not to exceed the normal work day or driving restrictions.

Lesson(s) Learned and Recommendations from Participants:

- It was starting to rain, but you can't see "slickness".
- I knew how to counter steer when I felt the rear wheels start to slide, but was still not able to regain steering control.
- Although I was going the speed limit, I was going too fast for conditions. If I had been going just 5 MPH slower the accident could have been prevented.
- I only had minor injuries from when the truck came to rest. I am thankful I was wearing my seatbelt or I might not be here telling this story. I'm also glad that there were no loose items in the cab to become projectiles. I only use the truck radio, because a handheld in the cab could cause significant injuries in a roll-over. I used the radio to call up to let my companion know I was OK.
- It was good being with another vehicle. I might not have been seen off the road and could still be there. A partner, a radio and a check in, check-out system can all help us out.
- I did a self assessment and knew I was bleeding, but I could feel my legs and there was no numbness in my hands so I self extricated myself and climbed up to the roadway, but was still so dazed that I almost walked in front of a truck.
- I probably should have put my Marine training aside and waited for some help and assessment to be on the safe side and prevent any further injury or complications.
- After rolling at least once, the truck came to rest right side up. The engine had died and there was no smell of gasoline so I could have waited there.
- It was good that we did a radio check before hand. Newer employees or others who don't use a radio often might feel uncomfortable using the radio, but everyone should know how to use it.
- I'm glad (the other driver) was using his mirrors and saw me go off the road and knew what to do. We had CHP there right away and notifications were made to the Forest ECC in a timely manner.
- After being assessed for further injury at the ER and being released, I wanted to drive home (a 3 hour + drive). It was raining, dark and we would have gotten back late after a long, rough day. I had lost track of the time of day. I am glad we were encouraged to stay over and return the next day. I'm glad we listened to that advice. It was a good choice.
- I hope people will read this and learn from it to avoid the kind of experience I had.

Lesson(s) Learned and Recommendations from Facilitator:

- A review of the driver's California driver's license, OF-346, defensive driver training history were all in place and current.
- Even applying the brakes to slow down can cause problems and even when steering in a skid, we may travel further than we realize.
- When "virtual employees" are involved in incidents like this, notifications may be somewhat confused and involve more than one forest. Communication is needed to ensure roles are clear.
- Posted speed limits are not "Must go ..." speeds. Advisory signs that seem too slow for dry roadway conditions are good indicators for wet conditions and can help prevent accidents.
- The driver didn't know what repeaters were on this forest, but he knew how to find a repeater. He mentioned appreciating the radio classes that teach this kind of information.
- Motor vehicle accidents resulting in death, hospitalization or damage of \$10,000 or more trigger post accident drug testing under the Executive Order for all employees. The Regional Drug Test Coordinator should be consulted if there are questions. The Forest Safety Officer has included a reference to post accident drug testing in the updated Accident Reporting Flowchart (see the FSweb Safety Page at <http://fsweb.shastatrinity.r5.fs.fed.us/safety/index.shtml>).
- All employees need to be aware of precautions for bloodborne pathogens and know that they are covered for assessment and treatment if exposed in the workplace.

“ Drive Careful ! ... and Wear Your Seat Belt ! ”