



Event Type: Motor Vehicle Accident

Date: April 23, 2022

Location: Harrisburg, Virginia

*“In all my years in the hotshot world,
this is the closest I have come to having our crew vehicles
involved in a major accident.”*

Major Motor Vehicle Accident: A Chaotic Few Moments

by

**Darren O’Loughlin, Superintendent
Jackson Interagency Hotshot Crew**

Narrative

After morning briefing at the North River District Office in Harrisburg, Virginia, our crew began travel to the worksite. The county highways in this region are narrow, there is no shoulder, ditches are deep, and there are endless blind curves/hills. Due to the size of our crew carriers and their precious cargo, we typically travel 5-10 mph below posted limits.

Our current crew convoy consists of the superintendent truck, two crew carriers (buggies), and a GSA short-term rental with trailer (this vehicle has no warning lights or striping).

While going over a blind hill, a major accident occurred in the middle of our convoy. The accident occurred 50 feet behind the first buggy going over the blind hill.

A car pulled out in front of a pickup traveling the opposite direction of the crew. The accident resulted in the pickup being sent airborne and rolling several times in the oncoming lane. Our second buggy had a following distance of 8 to 10 seconds. The driver of that buggy needed every second of that distance.

Phenomenal Job

The two individuals in the cab of the second buggy did a phenomenal job of stopping the truck, communicating the accident on the radio, and getting the emergency lights on. A second or two delay in their action would likely have resulted in a very different outcome. In all my years in the hotshot world, this is the closest I have come to having our crew vehicles involved in a major accident.

After the accident, the crew notified 911 and local contacts. The crew also positioned our remaining vehicles to slow traffic, and our EMTs checked on occupants of the involved vehicles. All were fine.

It was a chaotic few minutes and I was most worried about my people. Because the road was mostly blocked, we cleared one lane of debris to manage traffic control and ensure that EMS had room to respond. We made sure to wear our high-visibility vests and were able to get traffic cleared within a few minutes so local EMS could gain access.

The local volunteer fire department and highway patrol were impressed by the scene we had provided them. Given their short-staff, they also asked us if we could stay and manage traffic.

We did stay to help and the crew did great.

*“Make sure people are situationally aware,
especially the two folks in the front seat of a buggy.
Vehicle training and checklists work. Plain and simple.”*

Darren O’Loughlin

What Worked

- ❖ We hired two amazing individuals to be in the front seat of a buggy.
- ❖ [BL-300](#) (the Bureau of Land Management’s required driver training) and our in-house training on roadside fires paid off.
- ❖ Vehicle color and lighting commands attention. General motorists see it and slow/stop.
- ❖ A [sterile cab](#) allows greater situational awareness.
- ❖ We relied on the knowledge of our crew members who had structure fire department /EMS experience for what to do.
- ❖ This was a terrifying experience, but it is important to note that the crew took immediate action to limit damage, improve the situation, and ensure that those affected were taken care of. This event was far out of our normal scope, yet little things like driver training and vehicle checklists proved their worth. The severity of this event was only seconds from ending in a different outcome. The local unit gave us down time and have been supportive.

FIRE VEHICLE DRIVER ORIENTATION BL-300



This RLS was submitted by:
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