

# Rapid Lesson Sharing

**Event Type:** Tree Falls onto  
Moving Vehicle

**Date:** August 27, 2015

**Location:** Chelan Complex,  
Washington State

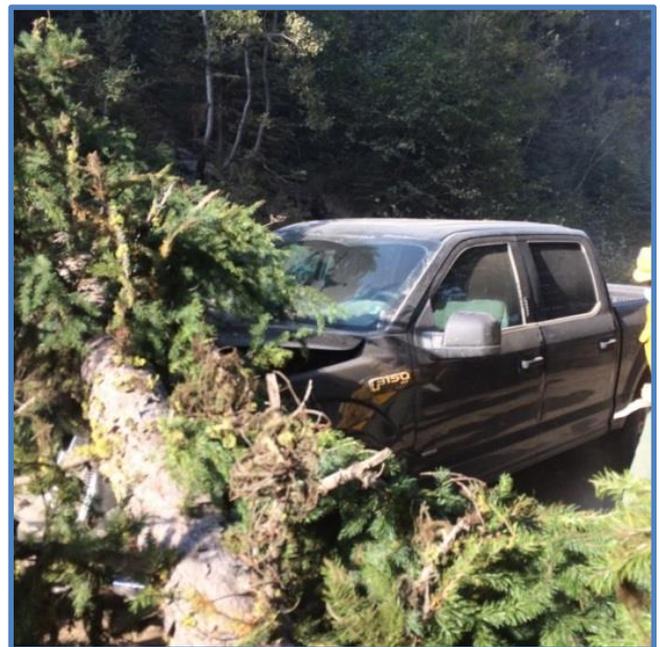


## NARRATIVE

At approximately 0900 while traveling south on USFS Road 3107 from the Black Canyon Road to Drop Point 75 on the Chelan Complex, an incident rental pickup truck (2015 Ford F150) was impacted by a falling green spruce tree (estimated 14-inch DBH) that fell from a six-foot cut bank above the road. The tree landed directly on the vehicle's hood (see photo).

Fortunately, the vehicle's operator was not injured. The vehicle received considerable front-end damage (see photos).

*The driver reported that he saw the tree falling  
but was unable to react quick enough  
to avoid the impact.*



**Top Photo:** This green 14-inch DBH spruce tree (whose roots had burned through—see photo below) falls onto the moving rental vehicle. **Bottom Photo:** Burned out root system of the spruce, located above the road on top of a six-foot cut bank. The tree's base was not visible to the driver.

## **Use of Road was Necessary to Access Fire**

Road 3107 is a single-lane primitive dirt road with turnouts that generally skirts the fire's edge but occasionally runs through the fire's main body. Dust, smoke, and snags had been identified as an issue along this access route.

While attempts had been made to mitigate these issues, due to other priorities, not all planned mitigation work had been completed at the time of this incident. The use of Road 3107 was necessary to access the entire western edge of the fire.

The driver of the vehicle, a liaison/leader with National Guard Crew #5 (C-110) assigned to the Division, reported that he saw the tree falling but was unable to react quick enough to avoid the impact.

The driver, who was wearing his seat belt, estimated that he was driving approximately 20 mph and that smoke and dust were not an issue at the time of the incident.





Crews used a chainsaw to cut the tree away from the vehicle.

The driver immediately exited the vehicle and reported the incident to the Division Supervisor.

The tree was cut away with a chainsaw and removed. The truck was then towed by military Humvee and then a commercial wrecker back to base camp.

### LESSONS

#### *Why This Report?*

This report serves to illustrate the ambient risks involved with fireline operations—many of which are essentially unavoidable. In this incident, nobody did anything wrong; nobody failed to do anything. It was, as virtually all accidents are, the result of a rare chance conjunction of events.

Unexpected events such as this are part of engaging. We accept the risk of this type of incident happening—which means we must accept the outcome. Even if we don't like it! Obviously, this could have easily gone much, much worse.

A well-worn safety mantra is: *"If it's predictable—it's preventable"*.

What if that's wrong? Maybe we've had it backwards all these years. In our environment it may be more honest to say: *"Accidents are predictable because they're not preventable"*.

In order to meet operational objectives, we must accept some risks. We all know there is no way to mitigate all risk to zero. We also know the actual likelihood of this event happening was extraordinarily rare. But, extraordinarily rare events happen, otherwise they would be "impossible"—not "rare"

### Damage to the Rental Vehicle: No Human Injuries



**Accepting risk means accepting the chance of an accident, even if we don't like it.**

This RLS Submitted By:

**Dale Snyder and the Chelan Fire Safety Officer, with support from the Pacific Northwest Wildfire Coordinating Group.**



Pacific Northwest Wildfire  
Coordinating Group

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