

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Pile Burning

Date: December 6, 2019

Location: Tiller Ranger District,
Umpqua National Forest, Oregon



Truck Gets Stuck in Snow Beside Burning—Threatening—Machine Pile

Narrative

On December 6, three members of Tiller Ranger District's fire management were assigned to burn piles on two units, Victor 191 and 354. Victor 191 has four subunits: 191i, 191ii, 191iii and 191iiii. The interior piles were hand piles and machine piles were located along the road. The units are approximately 15 miles from the district office.

The group burned the Victor 354 Unit and then Victor 191 through the 191iii units without incident.

Because the Victor 191iii Unit was located on both sides of a road, they split into two groups. One crew member burned alone and the two other crew members formed a second group. When the solo individual finished his section of the unit, he continued on foot to Victor 191iiii (located immediately adjacent to 191iii) while the other group finished their section of 191iii.

After lighting a few piles, the solo individual ran out of propane and decided to walk back to the truck, which was parked on Victor 191ii, to get more propane.

Approximate Timeline

- 1330** – Pile next to vehicle lit. Crew determines that the vehicle is stuck.
- 1345** – The crew attempts to contact the supervisor and district office.
- 1350** – Crew contacts Dispatch and requests a tow truck.
- 1400** – Supervisor is notified of situation and begins to drive out to the incident site.
- 1445** – Supervisor arrives on scene and attempts to pull truck out with winch. At this time, supervisor's truck receives radiant heat damage.
- 1515** – Supervisor returns to the station.
- 1600** – Supervisor contacts an Engine Boss at the station. She agrees to take an engine up to the incident site to assist. Supervisor stays behind to wait for tow truck.
- 1645** – Engine arrives on scene and begins to cool down the pile.
- 1715** – Tow truck arrives at the district office and heads out to the incident site.
- 1800** – Tow truck arrives on scene and pulls out the stuck vehicle.

Because the others were already walking toward 191iiii burning piles, he informed them that he was going to bump the truck to 191iiii.

When he bumped the truck, a 2014 Dodge Ram 3500, he parked it next to a large landing machine pile on 191iiii. The ground was covered in snow. It seemed the truck was in a good location—he wasn't going to light that large landing pile until the end of the day, right before they left. He continued lighting the rest of the unit.

Soon, the other group showed up and helped light all the piles except the landing pile that the truck was parked beside. After the rest of the unit was lit, the group lit that landing pile—located roughly 50-60 feet from the truck.

Truck Tires Spin in the Snow

Once they determined that the fire was established, one of the crew members got into the truck to pull it away from the pile so they could return to the station. But when he attempted to move the truck, the tires started to spin in the snow. He tried again, but the tires just spun and the rear of the truck slid away from the road.



When the engine arrived at 1645 they sprayed 750 gallons of water on the pile.

He informed the other two crew members that the truck was

unable to move. (The burning pile wrapped around to the road, directly beside the truck.) They attempted to dig away the snow from in front of the tires (using tools from the vehicle, including a shovel, pulaski, and rogue hoe). But when they tried move the truck again, it remained stuck.

For the next 15 minutes they continued to try to get the truck unstuck. They then decided that they needed to inform someone that they would need help getting the truck out. They attempted to raise a supervisor on the radio but received no answer. They then attempted to raise the station but again received no answer. (The district office was being fumigated and therefore no one was there.)

Supervisor is En Route

They then contacted the Dispatch Center and informed that they were stuck with a pile burning relatively close to their truck and needed to contact someone at the station to come help. Approximately 15 minutes later, Dispatch contacted the group and informed that a supervisor and was en route with a truck to help pull them out. Dispatch also asked if they would like a tow truck to respond in case the supervisor was unable to get the truck unstuck. They decided to, yes, keep the tow truck also responding.

While waiting for the supervisor to arrive, the group continued attempting to get the truck unstuck on their own. Using their tools, they dug in front of the tires to clear a path through the snow. In addition, they placed rocks and pieces of wood under the tires for traction. Unfortunately, these attempts continued to be unsuccessful.

Supervisor's Truck Receives Radiant Heat Damage

During Attempted Winching Operation

When the supervisor arrived, they attempted to pull the truck free using a winch, but were unable to do so. One of the squad members then began cutting a swath through the burning landing pile with a chainsaw to stop/slow the progression of the fire toward the truck.

They then noticed that the side of the supervisor's truck facing the fire was starting to blister and having plastic begin to melt from the radiant heat. They disconnected the winch cable from the stuck truck and moved the supervisor's truck away from the landing pile fire.

The supervisor decided to return to the station and return in an engine to spray water on the pile. After he left, the group continued clearing a swath through the pile with a chainsaw.

Engine is On Its Way

Dispatch then called and informed that the tow truck was en route, but someone would need to meet it at the station to direct it to their location. The supervisor copied that radio traffic and informed that he had made contact with the Engine Boss at the district. She will bring an engine to their location. He will wait for the tow truck.

The engine arrived a short time later. They sprayed 750 gallons of water on the pile, which slowed the progress and dissipated quite a bit of heat near the truck. The tow truck arrived a short time after that. They were able to successfully pull the truck out without it receiving any damage.

The radiant heat damage to the supervisor's vehicle included: melted plastic on the passenger side rear brake light; mount around for the antenna; light bar; and bubbling and peeling of the vehicle's stickers.



Radiant heat damage to the supervisor's truck.

Challenges

- ❖ Don't park next to a pile that you intend to burn.
- ❖ Make sure that all vehicles have the necessary tools.
- ❖ Be aware of possible damage from radiant heat.
- ❖ Communication issues with the district office.
- ❖ Due to location, the amount of time it took to get help to site.

Successes

- ❖ Clear and prompt communication with Dispatch.
- ❖ No injuries/no catastrophic damage.

This RLS was submitted by: Module/Crew Overhead

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