

# **BLUE SHEET**

## **California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE)**

### **Preliminary Summary Report of Serious CAL FIRE Injuries, Illnesses, Accidents and Near-Miss Incidents**



#### **Falling Tree vs. Vehicle / Near Miss**

**September 7, 2014**

**Bridge Incident**

**14-CA-MMU-015818**

#### **California Southern Region**

This Preliminary Summary Report is intended as an aid in accident prevention, and to provide factual information from the first 24 hours of the accident review. To that end it is published and distributed within a short time frame. Information contained within may be subject to revision as further investigation is conducted, and other reports and documents are received.

**Lookout**

**Communications**

**Escape Routes**

**Safety Zones**

## **SYNOPSIS**

On Sunday September 7, 2014, at approximately 2100 hours, a CAL FIRE utility vehicle was struck by a falling tree within the fire perimeter causing major damage to the utility. The two occupants of the vehicle were uninjured.

## **NARRATIVE**

On Sunday September 7, 2014, a CAL FIRE Fire Captain (FC) was assigned to the Bridge Incident as a line safety officer on Branch II. At approximately 2030 hours, the FC made contact with a private water tender operator (WTO) who wanted to scout out a narrow dirt road where the WTO was assigned to support an engine strike team. This was the first shift for the WTO on the Bridge Incident and was unfamiliar with the division. The FC suggested the WTO ride in the utility vehicle to scout out the dirt road together, versus traveling the roads in the water tender.

While driving on the dirt road, the FC and WTO stopped to have a conversation with a strike team leader (STEN), from a CAL FIRE Type III engine strike team. The STEN approached the driver's window of the utility vehicle and engaged in a conversation with the FC, at which time the FC put the utility vehicle into park.

Approximately 50 feet away from the utility vehicle, an engine crew from the strike team was using a reel line to actively mop up a large fire damaged cedar tree. The FC and the STEN heard the firefighters in the area yell, "Tree, Tree, Tree." None of them knew which direction the tree was falling; the STEN hunched down near the driver's side door. Once the STEN determined the tree was falling in their direction the STEN then retreated toward the rear of the utility vehicle.

While the STEN retreated to the rear of the utility vehicle, the FC put the utility vehicle in reverse to move out of the way of the falling tree. The FC recognized the STEN had retreated behind utility vehicle and delayed moving backward. The FC observed the STEN exit the rear area of the utility vehicle through the passenger side mirror; the FC then backed the utility vehicle up rapidly. The utility vehicle was moved approximately 5 feet before being struck by the top section of the falling tree. The tree struck the utility vehicle down the center line of the vehicle. The tree caused major damage to the front hood, passenger compartment and front windshield. Both the FC and WTO were able to safely exit the vehicle and were uninjured. The STEN was able to exit the area and was also not injured.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE CORRECTIVE ACTIONS**

- Evaluate risk versus gain when working in areas with fire-damaged trees during low visibility conditions.
- Continue to scout out the area to be worked prior to fire suppression.
- Ensure Escape Routes are identified and relayed to all personnel.