

# Rapid Lesson Sharing

**Event Type:** Water Tender Rollover

**Date:** September 27, 2020

**Location:** August Complex South Zone,  
Mendocino National Forest,  
California

## Water Tender Rollover

*“He was crawling out from under the front of the truck when I pulled up.”*

**Second Water Tender Operator**

At approximately 0755 hours on September 27<sup>th</sup>, August Complex South Zone communications was notified of a Water Tender accident via radio by another Water Tender Operator who was also working in the area.

The Water Tender involved in the accident was full with approximately 4,000 gallons of water being utilized for road dust abatement.

Before experiencing radio challenges, the first Water Tender on scene was able to notify communications that there had been an accident and the Water Tender Operator had an injury to the shoulder, back and neck.

It is unknown if the driver was ejected from the vehicle during the accident, but the first water tender on scene did observe the driver climbing out from underneath the front bumper area of the wreckage.

Due to the accident’s location and lack of clarity of the nature of the accident/injuries, the Incident Management Team started a Life Flight response per the Medical and Incident Within an Incident (IWI) Plan.

Upon activating the local Life Flight care provider, it was determined that the closest two helicopters were unavailable due to maintenance issues, leaving the third option of an ETA of 35 minutes. The decision was made to utilize the exclusive use Helicopter 514, staffed with an EMT, to transport the patient with a 10 minute ETA.



**Top Photo:** The Water Tender after the roll over.

**Bottom Photo:** Shows the divot in the road created by the upper passenger corner of the Water Tender’s tank during the rollover.

A Safety Officer assigned to the incident arrived on scene, provided a size-up of the incident and assumed command of the IWI. When units arrived on scene, the Water Tender was upright, resting on its wheels against a tree with its tank separated from the chassis.

The area of the accident had a suitable landing spot. The patient was loaded into the helicopter and taken to the local trauma center for evaluation.

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### LESSONS

- Always take the time to put on your seatbelt. This should be a given because it is a state law, but in a rush to accomplish a task or when a task is short duration, clicking a seatbelt can get skipped. A properly worn seatbelt can reduce injuries during an unintended outcome.
- It is critical for any vehicle operator to keep vehicles at a reduced speed to the extent possible while vehicles are under heavy load driving on surfaces with increased stopping distances
- Beware of soft shoulders, narrow sections, blind corners, compromised visibility, and **distractions**—any combination of these conditions is especially dangerous.

**The Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center has reports for [13 Water Tender Rollovers from 2015-2020](#).**

- Given the frequency with which water tenders roll on wildland fires, be very judicious about assigning work for tenders. Always ask: *“Is this mission necessary?”*

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