

# Rapid Lesson Sharing

**Event Type:** Boulder Near Miss

**Date:** September 16, 2017

**Location:** Uno Peak Fire, Washington

***It was at this point that the excavator dislodged a large boulder that rolled down the hill, passing between the two trucks . . .***

## **NARRATIVE**

As indicated by the multiple fire scars in the Uno Peak Fire footprint, this incident is located in an area that has a relatively frequent fire regime.

The topography and limited access here in central Washington also promotes large fire growth, which can create greater risk to wildland firefighting personal engaged in suppression and management activities. Thus, this area has had previous firefighting-related injuries and accidents.

### **Support Trucks Load Additional Hose**

On Saturday September 16, the Uno Peak Fire had begun to transition into rehab and repair operations.



**One of the three ground support trucks.**

Three ground support trucks and drivers arrived at Drop Point (DP) 20 to pick up a back haul of fire equipment. After loading this backhaul at DP 20, they noticed that they still had some room left in their trucks. So, the three trucks and members of a 20-person crew drove a short distance down Road 8200 to load an additional stack of hose. This hose was located where the fire line crossed the road.

Approximately 180 feet above this area where the hose was located, an excavator was busy rehabbing a section of fire line, which created a large amount of dust. While this made it difficult for the operator to see the road below, he had a radio to talk to his chase truck driver.

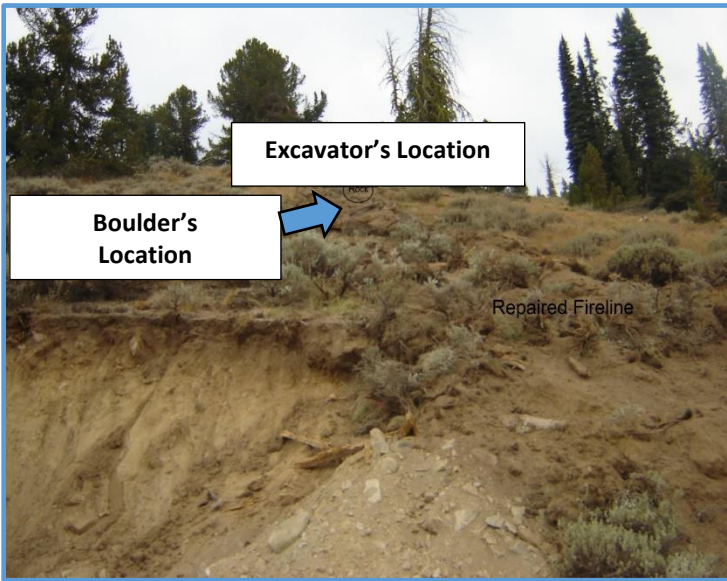
Due to the large geographical area and an extremely busy fire season that contributed to a general shortage of resources, this excavator did not have a Heavy Equipment Boss (HEQB) present for this operation.

Therefore, the chase truck for the excavator was parked on the road below, where he could keep an eye on the road and make sure the excavator didn't have any issues.

### **This Potentially Hazardous Road Requires Mile Marker/Communication Plan**

The Incident Management Team had previously identified this long and narrow road with its steep drop toward Lake Chelan as posing significant driving hazards. A mile marker and communication plan was therefore developed to mitigate some of these hazards.

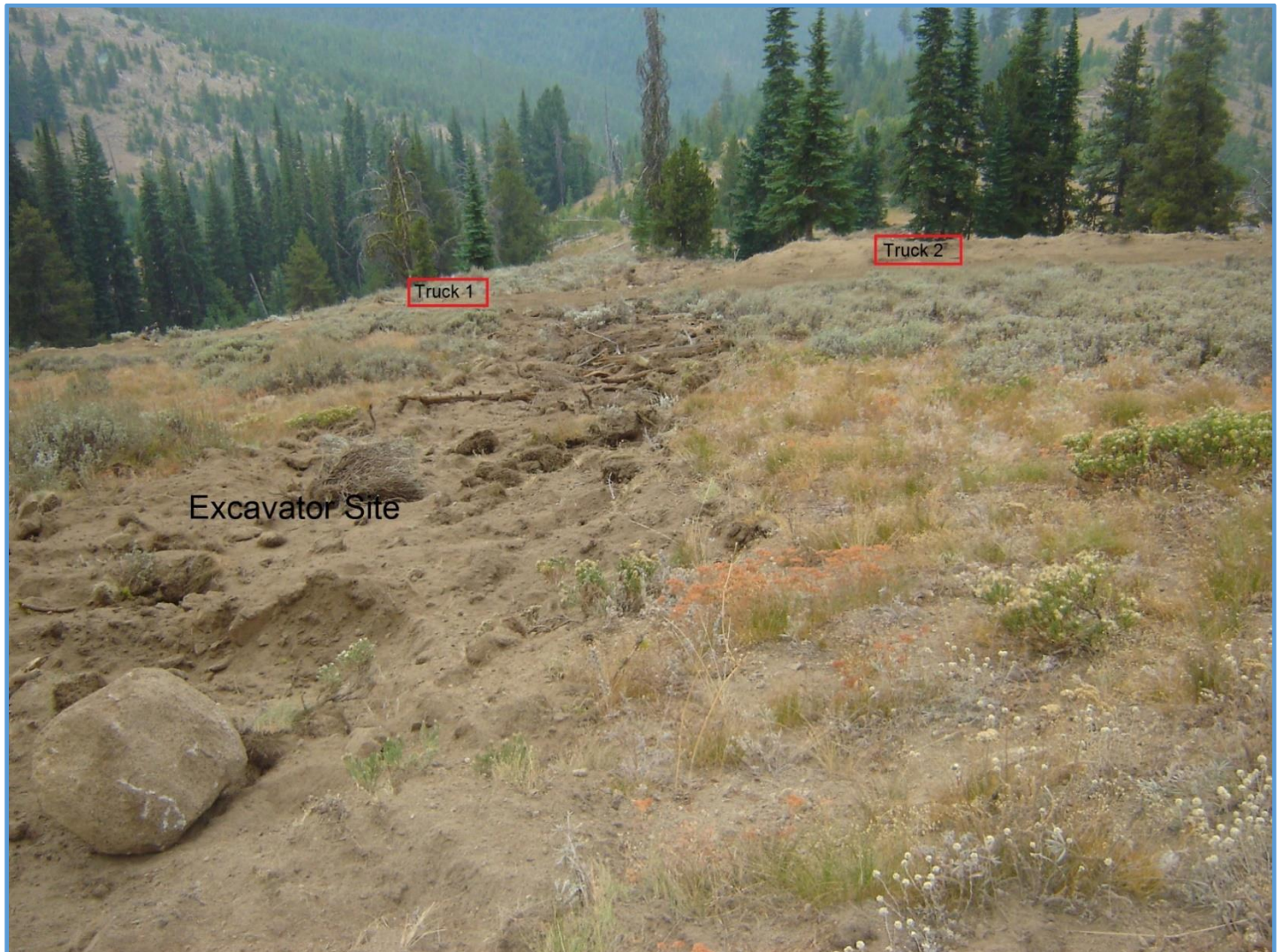
However, when the ground support drivers and crew support arrived to load the hose, the excavator's chase truck driver was a little surprised. He had not heard them call out the mile markers that had been put along on the road to help prevent any traffic issues.



### Excavator Dislodges Large Boulder

The excavator's chase truck moved up the road to stop any additional traffic from coming through the area. The chase truck driver asked the other drivers when they would be able to leave. After a few more minutes, the chase truck driver contacted the ground support drivers and crewmembers again, encouraging them to leave the area. They were still on the road where the hose had been, watching the excavator working to repair the line.

The first driver in line got back into his truck and moved it forward approximately 50 feet—just past where the fire line connected with the road. It was at this point that the excavator dislodged a large boulder that rolled down the hill, passing between the two trucks. Fortunately, it did not strike any people or equipment.



The view looking down the fire line from the excavator's position. The boulder in foreground is the approximate size of the dislodged boulder that narrowly missed the two trucks below.

***It can be easy to forget that we should be just as diligent heading to and from the fire, or on “deceptively quiet areas” of your fire.***

## **LESSONS**

When working on or around the fire line, the vast majority of the time we are at the top of our game. Our situational awareness is heightened. Our 10 Standard Fire Orders and 18 Watchout Situations are known, addressed and if need be, mitigated.

However, it can be easy to forget that we should be just as diligent heading to and from the fire, or on “deceptively quiet areas” of your fire. As it states in the IRPG under “Common Denominators of Fire Behavior on Tragedy Fires:” *It is just as important to be mindful of not just the fire behavior, but our surroundings in these areas as well.*

- ❖ Working near heavy equipment is inherently dangerous. There are actions we can take to make it less so:
  - ✓ Do not work or park below heavy equipment working on hillsides.
  - ✓ Establish positive communication with equipment operators to let them know you are in their area. If possible, have a HEQB present to help facilitate this.
  - ✓ If communication cannot be established, assume the operator is not aware you are in the area and stay back at a safe distance.
- ❖ If you are working with a piece of heavy equipment stop if people or vehicles enter your area and ensure they are in a safe location.
- ❖ When in steep terrain, be mindful that rolling debris is always a hazard to consider.
- ❖ Use road guards when possible to minimize exposure to personnel who are in the area of fire line operations that can impact roadways.
  - ✓ Before going to the fire line, ensure that you are familiar with the incident tracking protocol and other safety mitigations that have been established.
- ❖ The risk of resource damage, such as soil erosion, invasive species, view scape and others, needs to be weighed against the risk to the people working to prevent these resource damages. These risks need to be considered during the fire suppression and repair effort so that the overall risks are at an acceptable level.



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