

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Vehicle Rollover

Date: July 16, 2018

Location: Aragon Fire, Santa Fe National Forest,
New Mexico



Truck #1168 in the bottom of the drainage where it came to rest after sliding off the road embankment and rolling over one time.

Background

On July 12, 2018, lightning ignited the Aragon Fire in a remote area on the north end of the Cuba Ranger District of the Santa Fe National Forest, just west of the Rio Chama Wild and Scenic River Corridor. The following day, District personnel rode UTVs and ATVs to scout the fire for the potential to manage it for multiple objectives. District staff decided to manage the Aragon Fire for multiple objectives with local resources.

Safety Concerns

The remoteness of the Aragon Fire created one of the biggest safety concerns: Access. To get to the fire, personnel travelled on National Forest System Road (NFSR) 505 for five miles. This drive took 20-25 minutes one way on a UTV.

Another safety concern: Rain deteriorated this road's conditions, making it slippery. During the current monsoon season, thunderstorms can occur every afternoon.

Narrative

For the first three days of the Aragon Fire there were enough UTVs and ATVs to carry personnel out to this incident. The Incident Commander (IC), aware of the threat of thunderstorms, posted two lookouts every day to monitor the weather.

On the third day, the IC pulled everyone off the fire at 1300 due to thunderstorms building in the area. Fire personnel traveled out NFSR 505 to NFSR 6, a good gravel road with a Staging Area. Though the threat of thunderstorms remained, it never rained on NFSR 505 or the Aragon Fire that entire day. Because of this threat of thunderstorms, resources never returned to the fireline.

On the fourth day, July 16, more personnel arrived. Due to the lack of UTV seats available, a few trucks were used to transport them into the fire. At approximately 1600, a thunderstorm formed quickly over the fire and it began to rain.

The IC directed everyone to leave the fire immediately for the Staging Area on NFSR 6—a 20-25 minute drive. While resources were departing, the IC called the District FMO, informing him that they were pulling out—and a thunderstorm had formed right over them.

Thunderstorm and Rollover

Two District fire personnel were driving Truck #1168 from the Aragon Fire to the Staging Area.

NFSR 505 contains a narrow section where the road is elevated above the natural drainage. Erosion had created a depression on the right side of the road in this narrow section.

The driver steered the vehicle to the left side of the road here to miss the eroded area. The vehicle began to slide off the road and over the embankment. The vehicle rolled completely over, coming to rest upright in the bottom of the drainage.

Several Forest Service employees witnessed the vehicle rollover. The driver and passenger exited the vehicle under their own power. An EMT arrived on scene less than five minutes after the accident. The EMT examined the individuals. While neither had visible injuries, both individuals were shaken-up and complained of soreness in their neck area.

For precautionary reasons, these two went to a local hospital that evening to be examined. Both were released within two hours.

Mitigation Measures Taken After the Rollover Accident

- ✓ UTVs were borrowed from other Districts to increase the number of people who could be carried into the fire to minimize the number of trucks being used for transport.
- ✓ All personnel going to the fire will have overnight gear with them. If it rains, they will spend the night on the fire and not drive out until the next day when the 505 road is dry.
- ✓ A Safety Officer (SOFR) was ordered for the fire.
- ✓ A Paramedic was ordered for the fire.
- ✓ A motor grader was brought in to smooth road 505 for better driving conditions.

Positive Outcomes

Both individuals wore their seatbelts and only experienced soreness for a couple of days.

The District did not have a qualified EMT. Because the fire was so remote, an EMT was brought in from the neighboring District before this rollover incident occurred.

The two individuals were taken to the hospital that evening for precautionary measures. X-rays showed no broken bones. The individuals were then released back to full duty.

LESSONS

- ❖ Evaluate how to mitigate potential hazardous road conditions each day of the incident. Do not lose sight of the reason for the mitigation.
- ❖ On roads that have a clay base, prepare for an overnight stay. Do not drive on the road until the next day when the road has dried out.
- ❖ When roads are slippery and muddy, pull over and put chains on the tires.
- ❖ Thunderstorms can form immediately overhead.

This RLS was submitted by:
Santa Fe National Forest

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