

Pothole fire Lessons learned.

Mitch Silvester's notes (BLM Incident Commander)

-Accountability check, when I handed off control of the right flank to the DIVS, I gave him a list of all the resources on that side of the fire, I never followed up to see if he made contact with those resources, and if those resources were aware that there was a DIVS assigned that they would report to. I could have also followed up on the progress of the line production, with either the DIVS or the resources after a few hours.

-ICs need to stay in close communication with the leaders for each RFPA, especially as incidents grow and a lot more people arrive on scene. *(I had talked with Mike Guerry a couple times to coordinate Three Creek resources, but I could have communicated much more. I didn't make contact with a leader for Sailor Creek till the next day)*(There are several key players that serve as directors/leadership on both the Sailor Creek and Three Creek RFPAs, I'm not sure if it is easy to tell if they are functioning as a lead for one, the other, or both. On large fires that cross boundaries, it might be good to establish a leader for each RFPA)

-ICs need to program phone numbers for key players with our cooperators into their phone. *(I should have also followed up on the radio traffic, relayed from Darcy, with a phone call to clarify the details of the situation) (I do carry a packet with all the operating plans for all of our cooperators, but after several hours of bumpy roads, that info had shifted somewhere in my vehicle and ended up under the back seat. I couldn't find it in the dark and assumed I lost it)*

-ICs need to program the RFPA repeater frequency into their radio. *(As the fire grows and the resources become more spread out, the range of tactical channels becomes less effective. Naturally, people start to rely on the repeater systems, since Davis Rpt is scanned by dispatch and other entities, and used as a command for other incidents, people tend to gravitate toward another frequency that isn't used for such critical communications) It would probably be a good idea for all BLM resources to have the RFPA Rpt programmed into their radios, especially as a back-up when the handheld radios are struggling to hit other repeater channels. BLM ground resources may also be able to glean important info about access, resource locations, or fire conditions if they are scanning the RFPA Rpt during a mutual aid incident.*

-Operating by yourself and/or isolated from others by distance or topography increases risk, regardless if it's a suppression resource or overhead. There was potential for the Pothole Incident to have greater consequences or a less desirable outcome. Not that we can't operate by ourselves, but we should also account for the extra risk as we make decisions on the line. *(Also, earlier this season on the Higgins fire I was by myself and had a really close call, and I can share that story)*

Darcie Helmick's notes (Sailor Creek RFPA)

from our point of view here are some things to add:

1. always have your operators back – our plan got changed – so what this happens all the time on fires?! We need to make sure that in dynamic situations we always have a plan to have a chase with our dozers. PERIOD.
2. communication is difficult with multiple frequencies and lack of repeaters – no cell coverage is also often a problem. Need a clear direction of how to communicate through chain of command when an incident occurs – and what we think an incident is.

I still think there are good things we can pull from this – things that were done correctly.

1. Doug pulled into the black (previously when his machine allowed him to).
2. Doug was fully aware of his safety zone (black) and his escape route (door, foot, black in seconds)
3. Doug fully prepared in all PPE even though some was lost in the fire
4. Doug had a working radio, and communicated effectively (or as effectively as he could) prior to, during and after the incident.
5. Doug was following direction from the IC and stayed in touch with his RFPA lead.
6. Doug/Darcy communicated the incident as soon as possible, not over the radio, to avoid unintended consequences of radio discussion (see above – need to work on).
7. BLM/RFPA relationship is STRONG!!!!

Discussion points from the annual RFPA meeting:

-Training, Trey Glineski, brought up the Heavy equipment boss class would have a lot of value for both dozer operators, and their swamper/dozer chase. I brought up, that I'm putting together a hybrid ENGB/ENOP class that is one to two days long. Hoping to help out the cooperators who received an RFR engine. No dates have been set yet.

-Radio Como, there was a lot of discussion trying to mitigate the issues with 5w handheld radios. Acarregui brought up the possibility of having the excessed 50w mobile radios run through the RFR program.

-Lessons Learned Review v.s. Investigation, for this particular incident the review was definitely the right optics to look at the situation. The word investigation can have an effect on people where they may be more nervous to share information especially if it were a mistake that they made.

-Having the IDL take the lead on the review was also a good move. If forced the IDL to really understand how the program they sponsor really works on the ground. As well as if there were more significant findings that could involve some difficult conversations, it would probably be taken much better if it came from somewhere other than the BLM.

-Everyone has been very open minded and trying to learn from the incident. Nobody has been pointing fingers. Other RFPAs had a few comments that the LLR report was very informative, and they felt like they learned quite a bit from it as well.

-Relationships, this incident reinforced the expectation that we need to communicate pre-season, post-season, during training, and during suppression operations. This is what builds and maintains a solid relationship.

-Overall the fire turned out successful, it would have been much much larger if there wasn't help from the RFPA (probably 300,000+ acres)