



TO :

FROM : National Wildfire Coordinating Group

REPLY TO : NWCG@nifc.gov

DATE : 10/30/2007

SUBJECT : SAFETY ADVISORY : Seat Belt Use Saves Lives!!

SAFETY ADVISORY : Seat Belt Use Saves Lives !!!

On October 1, 2007, a helitack crew vehicle driven by an agency employee hit a guard rail. The driver attempted to regain control but over-corrected, striking another guard rail and going airborne off the side of the hill about 90 feet before hitting the hillside. The vehicle landed on its driver side first, crushing the driver cab, whereupon the crew compartment separated from the cab and chassis. The two units then rolled several times down a 100 percent slope coming to rest 235 feet below the highway, being stopped only by heavy timber. There were 8 people in the vehicle at the time.



H534's crew buggy is now scrap metal

On September 19, 2007 two agency employees in a light engine were responding to a wildland fire. While coming out of a right turn in the road, the back dual tires came upon a soft portion of road bed, causing the vehicle to swerve to the left. Taking evasive action, the driver first pulled right and then to the left again. The rear wheels then dropped into the uphill side sandy ditch

and forced the vehicle to swerve off the road and over the right side of the embankment. The vehicle rolled twice side over side before coming to rest approximately 62 feet below the embankment.



Engine 3144 needs serious repairs

Both of these accidents involved agency employees driving fire vehicles en route to fires. Including drivers and passengers, there were a total of 10 agency employees in these rollover accidents. Yet only minor injuries were sustained! Why? All 10 vehicle occupants were wearing their seat belts.

According to data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 42,426 people were killed in motor vehicle crashes in 2006. Another 2.575 million people were injured. More than half of the passenger vehicle fatalities experienced in 2006 involved people who were unrestrained.

A recently published report, *Wildland Firefighter Fatalities in the United States: 1990 - 2006* (<http://www.nwcg.gov/pms/pubs/pubs.htm>), states that during that time period, motor vehicle accidents were the cause of 23% of total wildland firefighter deaths. Statistically, they were the second biggest killer of firefighters during this time period, second only to aircraft accidents.

Firefighters should be well aware that driving is one of the most hazardous parts of our job. Yet we can cite a number of recent agency vehicle accidents in which employees were not wearing their seat belts. Injuries sustained by unrestrained vehicle occupants are almost always more severe than those experienced by people wearing their seat belts. Part of being a professional wildland firefighter is knowing about and using your Personal Protective Equipment. A seat belt is one of your most important pieces of PPE - WEAR IT.
