

Staff Ride

Resources



Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program

Thirtymile Fire – Audio Transcript

Voice of Matt Rutman, Stand #4

The speed in which it became a fire show to a deployment situation, the speed, you know, a matter of seconds, so not enough time to, at least for me, to have prepared myself in a safe way to go in the shelter. You know, as far as facing the correct direction, getting rid of your pack, fully extending the shelter. I went in from a prone position. I had never trained. I had trained from a standing position only. I deployed from the ground so that was something I didn't know how to do, but I did it. I didn't do it as good as it could've been done. The shelter itself didn't fully extend. I was rolled up into a fetal position rather than a full extended position, therefore, I had less of a barrier, insulation barrier in the shelter, I has less air, less air to breathe, and that feeling of being curled up in that ball I think makes you feel even more kind of just more trapped and you know, that intensity was just kinda heightened. For me it was the most afraid I've ever been in my life and everything that you've read about, people thinking about, you know, you're gonna die, feeling the presence of death or darkness in there. I felt all of that. Fighting the urge to pull off the shelter and make a run for it or get out because you feel so trapped. Went through that. But then I mean, for me, I guess one of the other things I'd say as far as a recommendation to firefighters also is, which most people already do, but is to carry a tool on their belt for one thing. Carry a Leatherman or carry a knife of some sort because what became sort of my way of coping through it was I fumbled around and was able to get my Leatherman out and started to dig into the dirt to make a better breathing space and I would dig a little bit and then get as close as I could to the ground to get the cleanest air that was cooler and just take a breath and then come back up and start digging again and then breathe, dig and breathe, and that was my way of staying focused and staying calm and finding the good air and as far I'm concerned that saved me. I mean, it was a matter of, the different between a few inches was huge as far as the heat. It was unbearable to be, to have your head up. You had to have your head on the ground. But the hard hat kind of, for me, was impeding me from getting closer. So I had to kinda work my way and push the hard hat back and still when I got my lips to the ground, it wasn't close enough. I had to find something, I had to go deeper than the ground level to find cool air. Air that made me think I would survive because the hot air made you realize that this is who you die is you breathe in superheated air and superheated gases and either you slowly die or your die fast, but either way you die. So that was something I was really keen on is the panic from breathing in that air made me realize this is how I will die if I don't find cool air and that cool air is gonna be on the ground and that knife might buy you an inch or two inches and that might be your life right there.