



TO :

FROM : National Wildfire Coordinating Group

REPLY TO : NWCG@nifc.gov

DATE : 07/16/2001

SUBJECT : SAFETY BULLETIN :30 Mile Fire Fatality Investigation

The attached document is the 72 hour brief for the Thirtymile Fire Fatality Investigation .



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Okanogan-Wenatchee
National Forests

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File Code: 6720

Date: July 14, 2001

Route To:

Subject: 72 Hour Brief—Thirtymile Fire Fatality Investigation

To: Chief

Narrative:

Forest Service Northwest Regular #6 Type II Fire Crew was entrapped by wildland fire, caused by an abandoned picnic cooking fire along Chewuch River 30 miles north of Winthrop, Washington. Fourteen crew members were involved in the entrapment, as well as two civilians who arrived at the entrapment site while trying to exit the area following a camping excursion. Fourteen shelters were deployed. One shelter contained one Forest Service person and the two civilians. Ten Forest Service personnel and the two civilians survived the burnover. Four individuals deployed approximately 100' upslope from the road. One person deployed an unknown distance upslope from these four. The remaining people, including the civilians, deployed on the road. After the initial deployment some of the individuals relocated to the river. The civilian's vehicle was destroyed by fire. The Forest Service vehicle sustained minor damage, but was driveable.

Preliminary Factual Findings:

- 1) fourteen members of a 21-person fire crew were trapped after attempting to extinguish a spot fire adjacent to a road ahead of an uncontrolled fire;
- 2) the initial crew assignment was reinforcement for the purpose of completing containment lines and mopup;
- 3) the fire transitioned to active fire behavior during the early afternoon;
- 4) after entrapment the crew took a position on a suitable deployment site;
- 5) the crew had adequate time to prepare and deploy shelters; two civilians shared a shelter with one of the crew;
- 6) 10 Forest Service personnel and 2 civilians survived; 4 Forest Service personnel died;
- 7) one survivor had severe burns and several others had minor burns;
- 8) preliminary autopsy reports show cause of death was inhalation of superheated air;
- 9) radio communication was not a contributing factor;
- 10) no significant weather event contributed to the entrapment;
- 11) the fire was located in a steep canyon, with a variety of fuel conditions and loadings (mixed conifer and riparian);
- 12) Energy Release Component was approaching maximum levels for this time of year.



JAMES R. FURNISH
Deputy Chief NFS
Investigation Team Leader

enclosure

Thirty Mile Incident Investigation Team

<u>Position</u>	Name	Agency	Work Location Address	Work Phone	Cell Phone
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