

## VEHICLE FIRE CASE STUDY

### Case Study Intent:

The Vehicle Fire Case Study is intended to familiarize students with the training requirements and policies when coming upon a vehicle and/or structure fire.

### Materials/Equipment:

- Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations* (Redbook)
- Incident Response Pocket Guide* (IRPG)

### Facilitator Information:

This case study describes the events that occurred when BLM engine modules responded to wildland fire in Southwestern Idaho. Upon arrival on scene, module members found a vehicle, horse trailer, and surrounding areas had ignited and were still burning. Emphasis should be placed on the policy regarding vehicle fires in the *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations*.

Review the case study and become familiar with the Vehicle Fire Case Study to determine what information is given to the students and what will be asked of the students.

Prior to presenting the case study, the instructor should divide the students into small groups of three or four. Once into small groups, allow 10 minutes for students to individually read the scenario and 10 minutes to answer as a group the five questions found in their Student Workbooks.

1. As engine operators and BLM employees, what were the crew's suppression responsibilities?

**Refer to the BLM Manual 9200 policy statement regarding vehicle and structure fires.**

2. Did the engine modules act within their scope of training? Should they have done something else?

**Yes. They put out the fire that was burning in the grass. They also provided water to the new Plymouth Rural Fire Department.**

**No. They followed the policy in the BLM manual.**

3. If there was still someone inside the vehicle would that change the way they responded? What are their options?

**Yes. BLM Manual 9200 states, “Actions will be limited to the exterior of the structure or vehicle unless there is immediate threat to human life.”**

4. What if a horse was still inside the trailer?

**This may present an ethical dilemma to students as the manual states “threat to human life.”**

5. Could the rural fire department order the BLM engine crew to assist with extinguishing the vehicle fire?

**No, wildland firefighters cannot be forced to perform an unsafe act or something outside their scope of training. Refer to the IRPG for “How to Properly Refuse Risk.”**

After the small groups have answered the questions, have groups present their findings to the rest of the class. Allow for feedback and discussion focusing on scope of training and policy interpretation.

Instructors are encouraged to add hypothetical situations and questions to the case study. Examples include:

- What are the legal ramifications of acting outside an engine operator’s scope of training?
- What policies exist for taking action on a structure fire?

## VEHICLE FIRE CASE STUDY

Date of Incident: July 27, 1998  
Time of Incident: 1404 hours MDT  
Jurisdiction: Lower Snake River District, Idaho  
Incident Location: Southwestern Idaho

### **Predicted Weather Forecast**

Thunderstorms  
Winds: 5-15 mph, SE to SW  
Temperatures: 86-102° F  
Relative humidity: 13-25%

### **BLM Manual 9200**

“Bureau employees may only take direct action on structure or vehicle fires when adequate local firefighting forces are not yet present. Actions will be limited to the exterior of the structure or vehicle unless there is immediate threat to human life. Employees must not knowingly be placed in a position where exposure to noxious gases or chemicals or other situations requiring the use of SCBAs. BLM units will withdraw from the suppression of structural/vehicle fires when local fire agency units arrive in sufficient force.”

### **Scenario**

On July 27, 1998, at 1402 hours, Boise Interagency Dispatch dispatched two BLM Type 4 engines (Engines 7140 and 7141) and one command vehicle (Command 7126) from the Wild West Guard Station to a fire reported by the Squaw Butte Lookout. The fire was reported to be on Interstate 84 at Exit 13—approximately a quarter mile from the Wild West Guard Station.

Upon arrival on scene at 1404 hours, Engine 7140 advised Boise Interagency Dispatch that there was a vehicle and horse trailer on fire as well as the surrounding grass and brush on the north side of Interstate 84 (I-84). The driver of the vehicle informed Engine 7140’s module leader that all people were out of the vehicle and the horses were out of the trailer.

At this time, Engine 7140 crew members heard what sounded like ammunition discharging from the fully-involved vehicle. The driver confirmed that he had several boxes of ammunition in the truck. He also noted there were several plastic containers of agricultural chemicals and veterinary supplies in the vehicle. Engine

7140's module leader advised dispatch of the situation and moved people from the immediate area.

At 1406 hours, Engines 7140 and 7141 began to take action on the growing brush fire, fully aware of the vehicle smoke and exploding ammunition. Fire behavior was moderate to high. Wind from the south/southeast threatened several small out buildings with attached corrals in the area. Both engines began flanking from I-84—Engine 7140 on the west flank; Engine 7141 on the east flank.

Two Forest Service engines, traveling west on I-84, saw the fire and asked if they could be of assistance. Command 7126 had the Forest Service personnel set up hazard reflectors in the right-hand lane of I-84 to help assist with traffic control.

At 1414 hours, New Plymouth Rural Fire Department (RFD) arrived on scene with four engines and initiated action on the vehicle and trailer. An ambulance also arrived on scene at this time. New Plymouth RFD assumed responsibility for the incident which was in their protection area.

The fire was held to .75 acres with no structure loss. After BLM engines secured the control line, mopped up the area, and repaired the fence that was cut during suppression activities, New Plymouth Command released BLM personnel back to their station.

Property damage included total loss of the vehicle and some damage to the trailer, including burned tires. The driver of the vehicle received minor injuries consisting of small cuts to the hands. The passenger of the vehicle was transported to a local hospital by ambulance for burn treatment to his hands and arms. Both horses received minor burns.

The following spring the New Plymouth Rural Fire Department advised the Lower Snake River BLM that they would **not** sign the Mutual Aid Operating Plan expressing concern over this incident and BLM's failure to take action on the vehicle fire. Nothing in the previous Mutual Aid Operating Plan outlined the capabilities and limitations of each agency.

1. As engine operators and BLM employees, what were the crew's suppression responsibilities?
  
2. Did the engine modules act within their scope of training? Should they have done something else?
  
3. If there was still someone inside the vehicle would that change the way they responded? What are their options?
  
4. What if a horse was still inside the trailer?
  
5. Could the rural fire department order the BLM engine crew to assist with extinguishing the vehicle fire?