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Report of the Week

"The 'L' in LCES stands for lookouts."

12/15/2011

Report Number: 11-0000334

Report Date: 11/01/2011 13:49

Synopsis

Snow laden branch falls near crew.

Demographics

Department type: Volunteer

Job or rank: Fire Fighter

Department shift: Respond from home

Age:

Years of fire service experience: 7 - 10

Region: FEMA Region II

Service Area: Suburban

Event Information

Event type: Vehicle event: responding to, returning from, routine driving, etc.

Event date and time: 10/29/2011 00:00

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Cloudy and Snow

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

- Situational Awareness
- Weather

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Property damage
- Lost time injury
- Life threatening injury
- Minor injury

Event Description

We were returning from a welfare check during the Nor'easter that dumped over a foot of snow in parts of the Tri-state area this past weekend. A tree fell in front of the engine, preventing us from reaching a safe destination to turn around. Due to the lack of area and long distance of backing up that would have been required, the company officer decided that it would be more prudent to remove the tree. To our advantage, the tree did not come down on any wires, therefore there were no additional dangers. This was about our thirtieth call in an eight

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hour period. We began to cut and move the tree. As I was shutting off the saw after completing the removal of enough of the tree to allow traffic to pass, the officer screamed "look out" as a large branch came down feet from us. A portion of the scene lighting was being utilized on the truck to light the scene.

Lessons Learned

Lessons I learned as a potential officer on a rig: Use all scene lighting. In the event of possible overhead dangers you need to have dedicated people watching for dangers. Do your work as safely and efficiently as possible and limit exposure to the dangers of the outdoors.

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Our brothers and sisters in wildland firefighting have been using an acronym, "LCES" to promote safe operations. "LCES" stands for lookouts, communications, escape routes and safety zones. These four practices are woven into operations as part of an ongoing effort to keep wildland firefighters situationally aware of their surroundings at all times. In this week's ROTW, [11-334](#), we take a page from the wildland community's "LCES" for safe operations and insert it into our playbook.

"We were returning from a welfare check during the Nor'easter that dumped over a foot of snow... A tree fell in front of the engine, preventing us from reaching a safe destination to turn around. Due to the lack of area and long distance of backing up that would have been required; the company officer decided that it would be more prudent to remove the tree. To our advantage, the tree did not come down on any wires; therefore there were no additional dangers...This was about our thirtieth call in an eight hour period... As I was shutting off the saw after completing the removal of enough of the tree to allow traffic to pass, the officer screamed "look out" as a large branch came down feet from us..."

Having a designated "lookout" for every operation, no matter how mundane, provides an extra level of safety at the scene. That designated lookout is often the company officer by default. Depending on the scale of the operation, a more formalized "lookout" may need to be put in place. Fortunately for the crew in [11-334](#), the officer's awareness of the situation kept the crew from suffering a tragedy. Once you have reviewed the entire account of [11-334](#), and the related reports, consider the following:

1. The situation described in [11-334](#) is not an uncommonly encountered situation in many parts of the country. Do you think you would have had someone looking out for other overhead hazards?
2. The operation of a chain saw severely limits voice communication. What other methods would you put in place to alert crews of imminent danger?
3. The reporter notes this was the company's thirtieth call in an eight hour period. Discuss what the impact of 30 calls in eight hours would have on you and your crew.
4. What training is required to operate chain saws in your department? When was your last refresher on that training?
5. Do you think you would have considered a "secondary collapse" of another limb so closely after the first limb fell?

The "L" in LCES stands for lookouts. The lookout's function is maintaining a wide angle view of the event. Given that responsibility, the lookout needs to refrain from engaging in any activity that distracts him/her from maintaining that global perspective. For more information on the tenets of "LCES" visit www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/lces/lces.html.

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Falling Tree Limbs/Situational Awareness

[05-628](#)

[07-880](#)

[07-936](#)

[09-749](#)

[10-357](#)

[10-747](#)

Have you experienced a near miss from falling trees or limbs? Submit your report to www.firefighternearmiss.com today so everyone goes home tomorrow.

Note: The questions posed by the reviewers are designed to generate discussion and thought in the name of promoting firefighter safety. They are not intended to pass judgment on the actions and performance of individuals in the reports.