

FATALITY ALERT

– PRELIMINARY INFORMATION –

BCFSC #2023-07-28

On July 28th, 2023, a wildland firefighter was fatally injured while working on a wildfire north of Fort St. John. Media reports indicate the Utility Task Vehicle (UTV) the worker was riding on rolled over a sharp embankment on a gravel road. He succumbed to his injuries while being transported by helicopter to Fort St. John. This is the second wildland firefighter fatality this season in BC and the fourth in Canada.

We extend our condolences to the family and friends of the deceased and our sympathies to all those affected by this incident.

This incident is under investigation and details are still to be determined; so contributing factors to the incident are not available.

Here are some suggested safety considerations:

1. UTV operators and any passengers must wear seatbelts. If the machine rolls over, the seatbelts will help keep everyone within the UTV's protective cab.
2. Consider what additional safety gear is needed when operating a UTV. It is recommended to wear an approved off-road vehicle safety helmet, eye protection, gloves, and boots.
3. Driving on resource roads can present many unique hazards including loose gravel surfaces, steep/soft shoulders, poor visibility caused by vegetation or dust, sharp corners, and deactivations.
4. Some hazardous points on the route will require getting out of the machine, walking the area, and developing a safe navigation strategy prior to proceeding.
5. Modern UTVs can be extremely heavy and powerful. This may be helpful in difficult and steep terrain but also creates additional risks if the operator pushes the machine, or themselves, beyond their capabilities. Proper training and regular operator assessments will ensure workers understand the machine's limitations as well as their own.
6. The added weight of equipment and supplies will change the stability and handling of a UTV. It's easy to overload a UTV especially when carrying passengers and equipment. Take the time to learn the load capacity of your machine and stay within the limits.
7. Wildfire firefighting and forestry field work often involves the employment of young workers. Remember that young workers need additional training, support, and supervision to fully understand the hazards of the job.
8. There is a tendency to rush when responding to emergencies like wildfires. Rushing can lead to increased risk of incidents. Taking short cuts, not spotting hazards, and working or driving too fast are some of the key factors that can increase incident risk.