

Vehicle Accident on Winter Mixed-Use Road

To help TPA members avoid accidents resulting in injury or damage to property, the Timber Bulletin will publish details of actual incidents and what can be done to avoid such occurrences in the future. The following information was provided by the U.S. Forest Service after an incident in Northeastern Minnesota.

Accident Description:

On March 2, 2011, two U.S. Forest Service employees were returning to their duty station, driving a pickup truck on a county portion of a forest road near Hoyt Lakes. The pick-up was towing a

trailer with two snowmobiles onboard. The afternoon was clear and sunny. The gravel road surface on the Skibo Road had patches

Lessons from Losses

of snow and ice.

At approximately 2:45 in the afternoon as they approached a curve on a flat roadway, a log truck (with no logs) appeared, heading in their direction. The log truck, operated by an independent owner/operator, began to skid and the truck-trailer "jack-knifed."

The driver of the Forest Service vehicle slowed, moved to the side of the road, and stopped. Due to the presence of a snow bank, they couldn't move the vehicle and trailer completely off the roadway.

After bouncing off the snow bank on the opposite side of the road from the Forest Service vehicle, the log truck slid into the driver's side of the Forest Service pickup – and continued around the corner coming to a stop approximately 250 past the pickup.

The impact of the log truck pushed the Forest Service vehicle into the snow bank on the passenger side. The collision was sufficient to cause the Forest Service vehicle's airbags to deploy. The two snowmobiles broke free of their secured mounts on the trailer



and one landed in the roadside ditch approximately 40 feet beyond the trailer.

The local Forest Service Law Enforcement Officer responded to the accident site and took charge of the incident. County law enforcement and state commercial enforcement also responded and determined that this incident was a

"no fault" accident.

Damage to the Forest Service pickup and snowmobiles exceeded their value. The log truck also sustained major damage: its rear axle was bent back at a 30 degree angle, rendering the vehicle inoperable. Additional damage occurred to the log truck's wheel in front of the rear axle. The log truck



driver was not injured.

It was reported by the investigating Forest Service Law Enforcement Officer that – prior to the accident – the log truck driver had used a Citizen's Band (CB) or a two-way radio to broadcast that he was "coming up the road" in order to find out if there was any oncoming traffic. The Forest Service vehicle did not have the frequency in use by the truck driver and did not hear the message, nor could they respond that they were coming down the road.

Conditions at Accident Site:

Travel on roads during the winter months presents numerous hazards. The two primary hazards present when this accident occurred:

- Road surface conditions were characterized as intermittent patches of snow, ice, and gravel
- Daily vehicle traffic

The road width – 22 feet at accident site – was sufficiently broad to provide safe conditions for oncoming vehicles to pass each other.

Visibility was unimpaired with regard to weather conditions. It was a clear day – with no rain,



snow, or fog.

According to the Forest Service driver, site distance was "good" for a corner on a forest road. When the log truck was first sighted, site distance was approximately 200 feet.

A sign had been posted at the entrance to the road indicating log trucks were hauling on the road.

This particular corner was also signed 'slow'; using white paint on a damaged red fender hanging on a tree in the middle of the corner.

Good communications are essential to preventing such incidents from occurring. The Forest Service is seeking input on how to avoid such accidents in the future.