



Downed Electrical Wires

Weather events such as extreme storms may bring down energized overhead wires, making it dangerous for workers involved in cleanup and recovery efforts. Circuits do not always turn off when a power line falls into a tree or onto the ground. Fallen power lines can kill you if you touch them or step on the ground nearby.

Safety First

- Consider all downed power lines, equipment and conductors to be energized, even if they aren't sparking or humming.
- Contact appropriate utility company emergency personnel.

Energized Dangers

- Downed wires can energize other objects such as fences, water pipes, rebar, manhole castings, bushes and trees, aluminum roofs, siding and sheds, buildings, telecommunications cables and other electric utilities. Touching a downed electric power line or energized objects can be fatal.
- Low-hanging wires have voltage potential even if they are not touching the ground. Do not touch them.
- Never drive over downed power lines. Assume they are energized.
- If an energized power line falls on the vehicle you are driving, remain calm and do not get out unless the vehicle is on fire. If possible, call for help.
- If you must leave equipment due to fire or other safety reasons, try to jump clear, making sure you don't touch the equipment and the ground at the same time. Land with both feet together and shuffle away in small steps to minimize the path of electric current and avoid electrical shock.

Back Feed Hazards

When energy sources energize other electrical conductors, back feed occurs. Energy sources may include circuit ties, switch points; lightning; generators; and downstream events. Avoid working on any object that may be energized by back feed. If working on equipment that may become energized by back feed is critical, proper Lock Out/Tag Out procedures must be followed.

Rules to Live By

- Do not assume that a downed conductor is safe simply because it is on the ground or it is not sparking.
- Do not assume that all insulated, weatherproof or coated wire is just telephone, TV or fiber-optic cable.
- Never go near a downed or fallen electric power line. Assume it is energized. Touching it could be fatal.
- Electricity can spread outward through the ground in a circular shape from the point of contact. As you move away from the center, large differences in voltage can be created.

Wildfires Create Risk

Fighting wildland fires near downed power lines can result in electrocution, electrical shock and electricity-related burns. Firefighters should assume all power lines are energized and call the power provider to de-energize the lines.

Source: OSHA

Safety tips developed based on generally accepted safety standards believed to be reliable at the date of publication. Information is for general guidance only and should not be relied upon for legal compliance purposes.

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