



Electrical Safety for First Responders

Presenter's Notes

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Welcome to Electrical Safety for First Responders. Today's session will share strategies for working safely around electric power lines and for handling certain emergencies involving electricity. By following the procedures we'll cover here today, you can keep yourself, your fellow first responders, and the public safe. Now I know that some of you will have heard this information before, and so for you, this program will be a refresher. For others, this may be the first time you're hearing about this topic, but I hope everyone will find the program valuable.

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Firefighters, police, and EMTs are typically first on the scene in an emergency and face the greatest risk from electrical infrastructure contacts. Understanding the potential dangers and dealing with them correctly makes everyone safer. This program is designed to supplement, not replace, your department's standard operating procedures (SOPs).

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Headquartered in Cayce, SC, SCANA Corporation is an energy-based holding company whose businesses include regulated electric and natural gas utility operations and other energy-related businesses. SCANA's subsidiaries serve electric customers in South Carolina and natural gas customers in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia.

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This presentation will cover key practices you need to know to keep yourself safe around electric power lines and on the scene of emergencies involving electricity. The topics we are going to focus on are:

- Respect the Power of Electricity
- Hands Off Electrical Systems
- Protect Yourself and Others from Shock
- Always Observe the 10-Foot Rule
- Be Aware of Overhead Power Lines
- Use Extra Caution Near Downed Power Lines
- Manage Substation and Transformer Fires

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Respect the power of electricity. First of all, we need to know a few basic things about electricity.

Electricity always seeks the easiest, most direct path to the ground through conductors like:

- Your body
- Trees
- Water
- Metal objects and structures including fences and even gutters
- And long or tall equipment such as ladders.

Even low-voltage electric shock can be fatal. Protecting yourself means always remembering that there are no minor risks when dealing with electricity.

Standard-issue protective gear does not insulate you against electric shock.

Electric shock and burn injuries may include internal tissue damage that is not immediately apparent. Make sure victims receive thorough medical attention. Shock victims often show no visible injuries or only minor burns on the skin, but the internal organs can be critically wounded. Treat these injuries as serious regardless of their appearance.

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Hands off electrical systems. Remember that even low-voltage electric shock is potentially fatal. To avoid this risk, keep away from electrical equipment and systems.

Never attempt to disconnect electrical services. This can be an extremely dangerous, even deadly, mistake.

- Never cut service wires or power lines.
- Never attempt to remove electrical meters. This is extremely dangerous and can cause serious injury or death.
- Never attempt to open or enter a manhole or vault until you are sure it has been de-energized.

Never touch or attempt to move power lines. Remember, your protective gear does not insulate you against electric shock. In dealing with electrical systems, employ a hands-off policy and call the local electric utility.

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Protect yourself and others from shock. Adhering to some simple best practices can minimize the risk of electric shock.

Always identify power lines and electrical equipment upon arrival at an incident scene. The first thing to do is to survey the area for overhead power lines, downed lines, and equipment such as transformers. Especially during or after a storm, look for lines down in trees or on fences. Proper electrical-safety procedures should figure into any operational planning.

Assume all lines are energized as well as all objects in contact with power lines. Even if lines appear to be insulated, the coating you see is not designed to protect you from shock. Additionally, areas around power lines and electrical equipment or objects in contact with them (such as trees, fences, or vehicles) should also be treated as energized. This includes the ground. Approach with caution.

If power lines or electrical equipment are involved in an incident, have your dispatcher contact the local electric utility. Calling is always the right thing to do whether you identify electrical infrastructure or are just unsure. They want you and the public to be safe and will respond quickly. Their personnel will switch off the power and tell you when the area is safe and de-energized.

As simple as it sounds, provide the best possible directions to the location. Intersections, landmarks, and specific buildings will help.

Secure the area. When dealing with electricity, your priority is to protect yourself and the public. Utility personnel will tell you when it is safe to approach.

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Always observe the 10-foot rule. The minimum safe distance from power lines is 10 feet.

OSHA requires that you keep yourself and your equipment at least 10 feet away from power lines. Maintain a minimum 10-foot clearance for power lines of 50,000 volts or less.

Higher voltages require greater clearances. OSHA regulations specify greater distances for lines of more than 50,000 volts. For example, the minimum clearance for a 500,000-volt line is 18 feet.

There is no uniform system for identifying power line voltage. When in doubt, contact the local electric utility for clearance information. Their line workers get a lot of specialized training that teaches them to recognize the voltages they're dealing with at any given site. Don't make the mistake of thinking you can know the appropriate voltage and clearance by looking at a line.

Electrical safety distances given are minimums. Always use the maximum possible distance. Your best practice is always to stay as far away as possible from power lines and electrical infrastructure.

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Be aware of overhead power lines. When overhead lines are present at an incident scene, remember a few simple safety rules.

Park emergency vehicles as far away as possible from overhead power lines. You don't want to be surprised by a falling power line.

Keep all aerial equipment at least 10 feet away from overhead lines. Remember the 10-foot rule and that metal ladders are conductors. Be aware that wind can move aerial equipment, and when possible, assign a spotter to monitor your equipment's proximity to power lines. Remember that higher voltages require greater clearances, and always use the maximum possible distance. (A good rule of thumb is to maintain a safety clearance that is greater than the length of the equipment when extended.)

Never use a solid water stream to fight fires near overhead power lines. A solid stream can create a clear path for electric current. When overhead lines are in the vicinity of a fire, you can, with extreme care, use a spray or mist. But remember that ALL water is a conductor and always be extremely cautious when using water around overhead lines.

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Be aware of overhead power lines. Remember that anything touching a power line may be energized.

If your equipment contacts a power line, the most important thing to do is remain calm and stay put.

- The equipment should be considered energized, as should the power line.
- Call the local electric utility immediately.
- If you can do so safely, move the equipment away from the power line.
- If the equipment cannot be moved, stay put, and warn others to stay away until utility personnel give the all clear. All personnel on the equipment should remain there. This is your safest course of action. Utility personnel will respond quickly, switch off the power, and tell you when it is safe to get off. Wait for their instructions.

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Be aware of overhead power lines. In some cases, other hazards such as fire make it impossible to stay on the energized equipment until utility personnel give the all clear.

If fire or other imminent danger forces you off the equipment:

- Jump clear, keeping both feet together and without touching the equipment and the ground at the same time. If you do, you will become electricity's path to the ground and you will be seriously—or fatally—shocked. Make every attempt to land on both feet at the same time.
- Shuffle away with small steps, keeping both feet together and on the ground at all times.
- Do not run or take long steps. When equipment contacts a line, electricity spreads out in the ground like ripples in a pond and the voltage decreases with distance from the point of contact. If your legs bridge two areas of different voltage you could be killed.

Demonstrate the jump-off procedure.

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Use extra caution near downed power lines. Dealing with downed lines requires additional measures to protect life and property.

Park emergency vehicles away from fallen lines. The ground and objects in the vicinity of a fallen power line may be energized. Wait for utility personnel to give the all clear.

Secure the area.

- Keep yourself and the public at least 30 feet away from fallen power lines. Always remember that objects and even the ground near downed lines may also be energized.
- Transmission lines from large towers require a distance of 100 feet. In any incident involving downed lines, recall that wind as well as electric charge can cause lines to whip and move. Observing these expanded clearances can help protect everyone from the unexpected.

Never touch or attempt to move fallen lines or objects contacting them. Doing so endangers you and incident victims. Contact the local electric utility immediately so they can de-energize the scene.

Never use a solid water stream to fight fires near downed lines. If you must use water to extinguish a fire near downed lines, use only a fog or spray, and be extremely cautious.

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Use extra caution near downed power lines. When incident victims are in or around the energized area, particularly in vehicles that have contacted power lines, remember that both you and they are safest staying put.

Do not enter, approach, or contact areas or vehicles that may be energized. Resist the temptation to attempt to extract passengers. You risk both your own and the victims' safety when you enter the energized area. Instead, stay away. You chose this work to save lives, and that instinct is strong. However, in this case, if you enter the energized area, you have a very high risk of electric shock. Becoming a victim yourself puts everyone in greater danger.

- Call the local electric utility immediately. They will respond quickly and de-energize the scene.
- Instruct occupant(s) to drive the vehicle away from the line if this can be done safely. Keeping your distance, find a position where passengers can see you without exiting or moving around inside the vehicle and attempt to reassure them.
- If the vehicle cannot be moved, instruct the occupant(s) to stay put until utility personnel give the all clear. Staying in the vehicle is their best protection against electric shock. Tell them utility personnel are on the way to turn off the electricity; to stay put; and to try to relax. If passengers are injured or panicked, talk with them, keep them calm and alert, and use the wait time to prepare medical assistance.

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Use extra caution near downed power lines. In some cases, fire or other hazards make it impossible for occupant(s) to remain in the vehicle.

If occupant(s) in an energized vehicle are in imminent danger from fire or other hazards, you must resist the temptation to approach the vehicle. Contacting an energized vehicle is a sure way to become a shock victim yourself! Follow these procedures to get everyone out alive.

- Instruct them to jump clear without contacting the vehicle and the ground at the same time. Find a vantage point where occupant(s) in the vehicle can see and hear you, but keep your distance.
- Tell them to shuffle away keeping both feet together and on the ground at the same time. Emphasize that they must not run or take long steps.
- Demonstrate the proper procedure from a distance. Show occupant(s) how to perform the jump-and-shuffle procedure from a visible distance before they attempt their escape.

If occupant(s) are injured, disabled, or otherwise unable to safely exit the vehicle on their own, your incident commander will tell you how to proceed. Wait for instructions before taking action or you could become another victim.

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Substation fires. Substations present specific risks.

Burning electrical equipment is already ruined and will be replaced. The safest course of action is to let it burn.

Contact the local electric utility and wait for their personnel to arrive. Never attempt to enter a substation without utility personnel present.

Evacuate the area and keep everyone at least 300 feet away from the substation. Your most important responsibility in these types of emergencies is to protect the public.

Electrical equipment contains oil. Be alert for explosions and toxic smoke.

Protect area exposures to prevent the fire from spreading. Once the area is evacuated, focus on defending nearby property and green space.

If an equipment fire must be suppressed, utility personnel and the incident commander will tell you how to proceed.

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Transformer fires. Burning transformers call for similar procedures as substation fires.

Do not open or enter switch cabinets or pad-mounted transformers such as this one. This is very dangerous and unnecessary.

- Never cut locks or pry cabinets open. Equipment contains live electrical components and if you contact them, you could be killed. Once a fire has begun, the equipment is unsalvageable and will be replaced. Don't risk your life to save ruined equipment.

Call the local electric utility, evacuate the public, and protect area exposures. Whether it's a transformer on the ground or on a pole, be alert for explosions and toxic smoke, and once the area is secure, do what you can to keep the fire from spreading.

Let transformers burn until otherwise instructed by utility personnel. They will determine when it is safe to extinguish an equipment fire and will advise your incident commander regarding the safest procedures.

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So let's review the key points of this presentation.

Identify all overhead power lines and electrical equipment upon arrival at an incident scene. Do this as part of your initial situation survey and include electrical infrastructure in your operational planning.

Whenever you suspect electrical infrastructure is involved or when in doubt, call the local electric utility. They want to help you keep you and the public safe.

Hands off electrical systems.

- Never attempt to disconnect electrical service.
- Never touch power lines. Utility personnel will switch off the electricity to de-energize a scene and will inform you when the area is safe.

Assume all power lines are energized, and keep yourself and your equipment at least 10 feet away.

Even low-voltage electric shock can be fatal, and remember, your gear does NOT insulate you against electric shock.

When responding to a substation or transformer fire, let it burn, evacuate the area, and protect exposures. Your focus should be on safeguarding life and property.

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Here are some important electrical safety numbers; Downed/Sparking Lines: 1-888-333-4465; Call Before You Dig: 811

In addition...

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For more safety information, visit www.sceg.com.

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Remember, safety around electricity is a team effort. At SCE&G, our first priority is the same as yours—public safety. If you have any questions about today's presentation or need any additional materials, please contact tflitter@scana.com.