

Sanoca Rural Fire District, Inc.
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES
EMERGENCY OPERATIONS

Fire Company Operations

Subject: Response to Power Lines / Energized Equipment

Revised: May 08, 2003

POLICY

It is the policy of Sanoca Fire Department to respond to reports of power lines down and other hazards involving energized electrical equipment (transformers, substations, electric vaults) for fire control and public safety. It is the responsibility of the company or chief officer to maintain that level of safety until relieved by another fire department, police agency or utility company.

PURPOSE

This procedure will establish a standard approach and response to the report of power lines down. Power lines can come in contact with the ground as a result of storm related activity, fire, or vehicles striking power poles. In all cases, the potential for electrical shock/electrocution and secondary fire must be considered.

ELECTRIC SAFETY AWARENESS

Electricity always seeks its lowest level or ground. It will travel any path it can as it seeks a ground. A direct path to ground is when contact is made between something energized and a portion of your body such as your hand, arm, head, or other body part. An indirect path to ground happens when you are holding something or touching an object that is in contact with something energized. This could include tools or other equipment you may be holding or when touching a fence, vehicle, or other object that may be in contact with something energized.

Gradient Voltage (Step and Touch Potential)

When power lines are down they will energize the ground around them. For Example: point of ground contact could be 700 volts. This voltage will lessen as it radiates out from this point; for example, 400 volts. If your feet are in areas where there is a voltage difference, you could complete the circuit and be the source to ground. This is called "step potential." This danger could be indicated by a tingling sensation in the feet and serve as a warning to back away from the area.

Key Points

- Lock out of down power lines by the utility company generally occurs after three (3) operations or attempts to re-energize. Even though you may hear this, do not assume the line is dead or de-energized. Downed lines must always be considered energized with potentially lethal current.
- Lines can reset and become "hot" or "energized" again by manual operation of a switch, by automatic re-closing methods (either method from short or long distances away), by induction where a de-energized line can become hot if it's near an energized line, or through back feed conditions.
- Power line tends to have "Reel Memory" and may curl back or roll on itself when down.
- Use caution when spraying water on or around energized electrical equipment. Hose streams conduct current! Never spray directly into the power lines. Use a fog spray at the base of the pole. Your primary responsibility is to protect the surrounding area.
- Transformer hazards: Smoke potentially fatal and carcinogenic; avoid and contain pools of oil around transformers.

RESPONSE TO POWER LINES DOWN

- Request utility company to respond.
- Consider all down wires as "energized."
- Place apparatus away from "down lines and power poles."
- Locate both ends of downed wires.
- Secure the area/deny entry.
- In the event of multiple lines/poles down over a large area, call additional resources.

DOWN POWER LINES AND VEHICLES

- Request utility company to respond.
- Do not touch vehicle.
- Have occupants remain inside the vehicle.
- Place apparatus a safe distance away from down lines.
- If occupants must leave the vehicle (fire or other threat to life) instruct them to open the door, not step out! They should jump free of the vehicle without touching vehicle and ground at the same time.
- Notify EMS (if enroute) if lines are on ground before they enter scene.

SUB-STATION, TRANSFORMER, ELECTRICAL VAULT AND MANHOLE FIRE

- Request utility company to respond.
- Clear the area.
- Be aware of explosion potential.
- Place apparatus in a safe location away from overhead power lines.
- Protect exposures.
- Do not make entry until above electrical equipment has been de-energized.