



[www.firefighternearmiss.com](http://www.firefighternearmiss.com)

## Report of the Week

Downed Lines are Hot.

06/03/2010

**Report Number:** 10-0000738

Report Date: 05/05/2010 17:00

### Synopsis

Wires down at scene proves dangerous.

### Demographics

Department type: Combination, Mostly volunteer

Job or rank: Fire Fighter

Department shift: Straight days (8 hour)

Age: 25 - 33

Years of fire service experience: 11 - 13

Region: FEMA Region V

Service Area: Rural

### Event Information

Event type: Non-fire emergency event: auto extrication, technical rescue, emergency medical call, service calls, etc

Event date and time: 04/01/2010 15:31

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Clear and Dry

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

- Human Error
- Communication
- Individual Action
- Situational Awareness
- Decision Making

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Life threatening injury

### Event Description

Note: Brackets [] denote reviewer de-identification.

Our Volunteer Fire Department responded to a dispatch of an accident with injuries at [location omitted]. A female in the vehicle was reportedly having chest pains. Rescue [1] arrived with a crew of two and found a [vehicle] head-on into a utility pole with one victim inside. The officer of rescue [1] gave a size-up, established command, and requested [utility company] to report to the scene for a wire down across both lanes of traffic.

The driver of rescue [1] was instructed to block the south bound lanes for scene safety. The driver reported to the vehicle to assist with patient care. The IC then completed a 360 survey to ensure scene was secure. While completing the 360,

Downed Lines are Hot

1 of 3

the IC observed the line being attached to the pole by what looked to be a pulley positioned below the transformer. The IC witnessed [name deleted] allowing traffic to flow both north and south in the northbound lane. The IC then observed the downed line being dragged by several cars. At that time, the IC made the nearly fatal decision (against all of his training and experience) to move the line out of the way of traffic. He did this to ensure it would not get thrown in the direction of one of his personnel operating on the scene, while also ensuring they did not trip over the line causing injury to themselves or the patient.

After the patient was removed from the vehicle, the [power company] arrived on scene and reported to command that the line was a neutral return line normally located BELOW the transformer that carries up to 7500 volts. The [power company] representative reported that had the ground been broken or IC had been a better ground, then the IC would have received the full 7500 volts when he moved the line.

### **Lessons Learned**

We need to rely on what we have been taught. All of us have either been taught or should have been taught to assume that all downed lines are live and can kill us.

Never allow personnel to operate in an atmosphere that could be energized. Again we all know this!

Remember that YOU are responsible for your safety and that should be your top priority.

The patient's life was not directly in danger and due to our complacency, we nearly buried two firefighters.

### **Discussion Questions**

What propelled the IC to move the line? One suggestion is a serious pattern mismatch in the IC's risk assessment. A downed power line that is not hissing, arcing and writhing violently does not look dangerous nor does it give any indication of being dangerous. So, once you have read the entire account, and considered the actions of the individuals involved in the related reports below, consider the following:

1. Why do you think the IC moved the line "*...against all of his training and experience...*"
2. What actions would you take to prevent the IC from grabbing the power line?
3. Is there a safe method for moving the line and not endangering yourself, the crew, or anyone else?
4. Does your department use power company equipment (gloves, hot sticks, etc.) for electrical emergencies?
5. If yes to #4, who maintains, inspects and approves the equipment to help shield the firefighter from an electrical shock injury?

**Related Reports – Topical Relation: Downed Power Lines, Vehicle Collisions**

[05-643](#)

[06-506](#)

[07-747](#)

[08-571](#)

[09-403](#)

Note: The questions posed by the reviewers are designed to generate discussion and thought in the name of promoting firefighter safety. They are not intended to pass judgment on the actions and performance of individuals in the reports.