



PLAYING IT **SAFE**

Working Safely Around Downed Electrical Wires

Helpful tips for preventing injuries after disasters

Electrical hazards exist in some form in nearly all occupations. However, those dangers are much greater for workers involved in cleanup and recovery efforts following major disasters and weather emergencies.

Downed wires can energize other objects, including fences, water pipes, bushes and trees, buildings, telephone/CATV/fiber-optic cables and other electrical utilities. Even manhole castings and reinforcement bars in the pavement can become energized by downed wires.

Assume the Worst

Above all else, assume that all equipment, lines and conductors are energized. This will help to reduce your risk of injury around downed electrical wires. If you notice downed wires or damaged electrical equipment, contact your supervisor and the appropriate utility personnel immediately.

Also remember that circuits do not always turn off when a power line falls into a tree or onto the ground. Even if they are not sparking or humming, fallen power lines can kill you if you touch them or the ground nearby.

Safety First

Follow these safety tips when working near downed electrical wires to ensure that you and your co-workers remain safe.

- Do not assume that a downed conductor is safe simply because it is on the ground or is not sparking.
- Do not assume that all coated, weather-proof or insulated wire is just telephone, television or fiber-optic cable.
- Low-hanging wires still have high voltage potential, even if they are not touching the ground. Therefore, do not ever touch them, and remember to consider everything energized until it has been tested and proven safe to touch.
- Remember that electricity can spread outward through the ground in a circular shape from its point of contact. As you move away from the center, there is the potential for a huge variation in voltage.
- Never drive over downed power lines—they may be energized. Even when proven not to be energized, they could become entangled in your equipment or vehicle.
- If you come in contact with an energized power line while in your vehicle, remain calm and do not get out unless the vehicle is on fire. If possible, call for assistance.



Fire!

When exiting any equipment due to fire, try to jump as far away from the area as possible, making sure that you do not 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 to avoid electric shock.