



YOUR LICENSE TO LIVE

Downed Power Lines: Knowing What to Do Can Save Your Life

Q: What should I do if I am in an accident involving a power line or other electrical equipment?

A: DO NOT get out of your car or truck. It is always safer to remain inside a vehicle, which acts as an insulator and keeps you out of the path of stray electricity. Call 911, and tell the dispatcher a downed line or other electrical equipment is involved. Power company personnel will be dispatched to the scene to de-energize the power.

Q: But shouldn't I get out and run to safety?

A: No. The safest place to be is in the car or truck.

Q: Is there any reason I should get out of the vehicle?

A: Yes, but only when your vehicle is on fire or you see smoke. If that is the case, make a clean jump from the vehicle without touching it, and then hop with feet together or shuffle keeping your feet on the ground as far as you can—preferably 50 or more feet away.

Q: Should I assume all downed lines are live and energized?

A: Yes. They do not have to be making a spark, flame or sound to be energized. Assume any downed or sagging line is “live” and has voltage running through it.

Q: So I can't tell if a power line is live?

A: No, there is no way to tell. Always assume it is live.

Q: What happens to the electrical current when a line is down?

A: Once a power line is in contact with a car or truck, the ground or other objects, it energizes the area. The electrical current spreads to the vehicle and ground, and it ripples out. Each “ring” of the ripple represents a different voltage. Stepping from one voltage to the next can cause your body to become a path for electricity and electrocute you. That is why you should hop or shuffle once you make a clean jump from the vehicle. Always keep your feet together – think of hopping like a bunny or shuffling like a penguin.

Q: What if I can't tell what type of line is down?

A: It doesn't matter – still stay in your vehicle and wait for the utility personnel to arrive.

Q: What else can I do?

A: Put your window down and yell to others not to approach the scene. They could be shocked or electrocuted if they walk or run over the energized area or touch anything that is energized.

Q: Are there any other instances when these same safety tips apply?

A: Yes, the same rules apply to any type of equipment (for example, farming and construction equipment) that comes in contact with overhead lines or electrical cabinets or equipment.

Q: So just to review, why am I safe in my vehicle?

A: Because you are not a path for electricity while in a vehicle.

Q: What should I do if the windshield is broken and the downed wire is in my car or truck?

A: Stay in the vehicle and do not touch or try to move the wire or attempt to use other objects to move the wire.

Q: What if I hit a pad-mounted transformer (metal cabinet or green box) in a yard?

A: Pad-mounted transformers house electrical equipment connected to underground power lines. The same safety precautions apply to all to these cabinets and the voltage that could stray when damaged.

Q: What happens if I am driving and see a downed line across the road, such as during or after a storm?

A: After storms or other events where damage has occurred along and in the roadway, be alert and slow down. Do not attempt to drive over downed lines or through water or over debris that could be covering lines or other hazards. Driving over a line can pull more lines or related equipment down. If you encounter a downed line, pull over and report location to 911.

For more information about electrical safety, go to:

