

KNOW WHAT TO DO IN VEHICLE ACCIDENTS INVOLVING POWER LINES

Stay inside until help arrives

Instincts tell us to flee danger. Unfortunately, in vehicle accidents that bring down power lines, these natural inclinations can lead to tragic results.

If your car hits a power pole, or otherwise brings a power line down, Southern Illinois Electric Cooperative (SIEC) and Safe Electricity urge you to stay inside the vehicle until help arrives. Getting out of the vehicle, with few exceptions, is the *wrong* thing to do until the line has been de-energized.

“You are almost always better off to stay in the car, especially if the line is in contact with the vehicle,” says Michael Logeman, SIEC Director of Engineering. “If the power line is still energized and you step outside, your body becomes the path for electricity and electrocution is the tragic result.”

It is best to wait until utility line crews arrive to make sure power to the line is cut off. The only exception would be if fire or other danger, like the smell of gasoline, is present. In that case, the proper action is to jump – not step – with both feet hitting the ground at the same time. Jump clear, without touching the vehicle and ground at the same time. Shuffle or hop to safety keeping both feet together as you leave the area. Like the ripples in a pond or lake, the voltage diminishes the farther out it is from the source. Stepping from one voltage level to another allows the body to become a path for that electricity.

Even if a power line has landed on the ground, there is still the potential for the area near your car to be energized. Stay inside the vehicle unless there is fire or imminent risk of fire.

The same rules apply to situations involving large farm and construction equipment that may come in contact with overhead lines. Those working with large equipment should stay inside the cab or remain on the vehicle if equipment extensions come in contact with power lines. Warn others who may be nearby to stay away and wait until utility line crews arrive to make sure power to the line is cut off.

While driving, if you encounter a downed wire on the road, always assume it is an electrical wire and energized, and stay in your car. If you come upon, or witness an

accident involving toppled power poles and lines, don't leave your vehicle to approach the accident scene.

Often our inclination is to step in and help those in danger and offer assistance to the injured. But in accidents involving power lines, call for help. Wait for trained assistance to arrive, or you could become an additional victim in need of rescue.

Accidents and fires involving electricity cause more than a thousand deaths and tens of thousands of injuries each year. The vast majority are preventable if people understand the dangers and steps they can take to be safe around electricity.

For more electrical safety information, visit www.SafeElectricity.org and www.siec.coop.