**Downed Power and Unknown Wires Model Policy**

*This model program is intended for general information purposes only. It should not be construed as legal advice or legal opinion regarding any specific or factual situation. Always follow your organization’s policies and procedures as presented by your manager or supervisor.*

**Purpose**:

Insert name of agency establishes this policy to guide the actions of officers, apparatus operators, and firefighters at incidents involving reported or actual wires down.

**Roles & Responsibilities:**

This policy applies to all officers and firefighters of the Fire Department/District/Company.

Insert name or title shall be responsible for reviewing this policy after downed wire responses to ensure it provides adequate and accurate guidance to officers and responders.

**Procedures:**

Response procedures shall be based on the following priorities

1. **All downed wires (electrical, cable, telephone, etc.) shall be considered as energized until tested and confirmed by the electrical company as de-energized.**
2. Secure the scene
3. Notify or update the local electrical supplier
4. Perform immediate rescue and evacuations of live victims
5. Confine and extinguish associated fires if safe to do so
6. Standby for the electrical supplier to de-energize or verify that the wires are de-energized.
7. Mitigate remaining situations

Additional guidance for each phase of the operation is given below.

**All downed wires, electrical, cable, telephone, etc., shall be considered by every responder as energized until tested and confirmed by the electrical company as de-energized.**

Consider any wire on the ground or hanging from a pole as a live wire. Wires such as telephone, cable TV, and other communication lines may be entangled with electric wires and must be treated as an energized live wire.

Electricity will always seek 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 that is energized and a portion of your body that is in direct contact with a grounded object. An indirect path to ground occurs when you are holding something or touching an object that is in contact with something energized. This could include tools and equipment you may be holding or touching, or other objects such as a fence or vehicle that may be in contact with the energized source.

Down power lines may energize the ground around the area of the downed wire up to 30 feet.

**Responding to and securing the scene**

The apparatus operator and officer should determine whether lights and sirens are warranted. Does the information from the dispatcher indicate that there could be a ‘true emergency’, that is “a situation where there is a high probability of death or serious injury, or significant property loss, and where the actions of an emergency vehicle operator can potentially reduce the severity of the situation”(USDOT).

The apparatus should stop at least two pole spans back from the downed transmission wire. The officer shall assess the situation from this location, using binoculars if necessary.

If a service pole is involved in a fire, the apparatus should be parked on the opposite side of the road and at least three (3) poles away from the pole that is on fire. This extra pole length is required due to the condition that is presented and the potential collapse hazard.

Power lines tend to have a ‘reel memory’, which means it may curl or roll back on themselves when they are down. Energized wires can also jump from contacting the ground or object.

If there is a potential hazard to vehicular traffic, the first arriving apparatus should take a blocking position. The second arriving apparatus should determine which of the following positions offers the best protection to the scene, bystanders, victims, and responders.

1. Secondary blocking position, about 50 feet before the first apparatus
2. Drive past the first apparatus and take a blocking position against traffic coming from the opposite direction. The apparatus should not drive over downed wires.
3. A third option determined by Command based on situational life safety objectives

**Notify or update the local electrical supplier**

Command should update Dispatch on the situation upon its arrival, life safety actions being taken, their blocking locations, and the nearest utility pole identification. The pole number can be found on the metal tag attached to the pole. If a pole number is not available, provide the address of the closest property or cross streets in relation to the downed wire(s).

Command should confirm Dispatch has notified the electrical company of this specific incident.

**Perform immediate rescue and evacuations of live victims**

Command shall make a risk-benefit determination on using firefighters to effectuate rescue of living or potentially alive victims. Firefighters shall not be assigned to recover deceased victims.

If the agency has a TAC (tester alternating current) Stick or other AC current indicator, insert the agency’s operational guidelines here. Owner manuals warn that only power companies have the training and equipment to ensure a wire is completely de-energized or that electrical interval automatic retries to restore power will not occur.

Sample: The TAC Stick may be used to identify energized areas, but under no circumstances shall the lack of a signal from the TAC Stick be interpreted to mean it is safe or not energized. Also, note that the TAC Stick will not detect DC power and should not be used near primary conductors.

Ambulatory victims shall be instructed from a safe distance to shuffle their feet and move to a safe location.

Victims in possibly energized vehicles shall be instructed to remain in the vehicle. If they cannot safely remain in the vehicle (due to fire or flooding, for example), they should be instructed to stand in the car door opening and jump clear of the vehicle with both feet together. Then shuffle to a safe location.

**Confine and extinguish associated fires if safe to do so**

Do not directly use water in an attempt to extinguish any fire that involves or is near a down wire, until the local energy company confirms to Command that the wire is tested and shown to be de-energized. Hose streams may conduct electrical current and voltage. Water can be used to protect exposures after a risk-benefit analysis by Command. Command should consider the conductive nature of metal components of structures, the water content of trees, and other factors.

Do not attempt to cut or remove a tree that is, or could become, entangled with power lines.

**Standby for the electrical supplier to de-energize the wires or verify wires are de-energized**

The fire company is the primary agency for fire and rescue hazards. It is not the primary agency for non-fire situations, such as traffic control.

If there is a fire or imminent risk of fire, the fire department/district/company shall establish a perimeter at a safe distance and act only to save lives or control the spread of fire to areas determined not to be energized.

Fire Command shall conduct a risk-benefit analysis whether standing by a down wire based upon the following factors:

* Concurrent fire or rescue needs in the primary response or mutual aid areas
* Degree of life hazard presented by pedestrians such as in a residential neighborhood
* Degree of potential property damage
* Availability of personnel from primary response agencies, such as police or public works
* Availability and effectiveness of barriers, detours, and other measures

If a higher priority dispatch occurs while standing by downed wire(s), Command will immediately advise Dispatch of a delayed response. Command will then transfer Command to police face-to-face.

Before leaving the scene to respond to a higher priority call, firefighters will assist the police with securing the area with fire/police line tape (if applicable and able).

Firefighters will advise the residents in the affected areas to stay inside their homes until a firefighter, police officer, or local utility company representative advises them it is safe to leave.

Once the priority call is complete, the supervisor will notify the dispatcher they are returning to the downed wire(s) and request an update from the dispatcher on any progress or actions taken..

**Mitigate remaining situations after wires have been determined to be de-energized**

Once Command has been advised by a representative of the electrical company that all wires have been tested and confirmed to be de-energized, firefighters can be assigned to firefighting, rescue, and recovery operations as necessary to mitigate and make the scene safe.