

▶ *Hanover Risk Solutions*

Electricity–Hurricane Cleanup & Downed Electrical Lines

Electrical hazards can be deadly for workers involved in cleanup and recovery efforts following major disasters and weather emergencies, such as hurricanes. High winds can rip utility, cable, and telephone lines from their power poles. Cleanup workers should not touch or move these downed lines until cleared by appropriate utility personnel.

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 even the ground nearby.

Downed wires can energize other objects, including fences, water pipes, bushes and trees, buildings, telephone/CATV/fiber optic cables, and other electric utilities. Even manhole castings and reinforcement bars (re/bar) in pavement can become energized by live downed wires. During storms, windblown objects, such as canopies, aluminum roofs, siding, sheds, etc., can also be energized by downed wires.

Always consider all equipment, lines, and conductors to be energized. Be cautious and if you notice downed wires or damaged electrical equipment, contact appropriate utility personnel.

The following recommendations concerning electrical hazards should be followed by all disaster cleanup personnel:

- Do not assume that a downed conductor is safe simply because it is on the ground or it 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 voltage potential even if they are not touching the ground—don't touch them. Wires should be assumed to be energized until tested to be de-energized.
- Never go near a downed or fallen electric power line. Always assume that it is energized. Touching it could be fatal.
- Electricity can spread outward through the ground in a circular shape from the point of contact. As you move away from the center, large differences in voltages can be created.
- Never drive over downed power lines. Assume that they are energized. And, even if they are not, downed lines can become entangled in your equipment or vehicle.
- If you are in a car when a power line falls on it, stay in the car! When you are in the car, you are not a part of electricity's path to the ground. Wait in the car until qualified electrical workers turn the power off and tell you it is safe to leave the vehicle. If people come near the car to help you, warn them to stay far away. Ask them to telephone 911 and the local electric utility for help.

- If you must exit any equipment because of fire or other safety reasons, try to jump completely clear, 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 and avoid electrical shock. Be careful to maintain your balance.
- Do not try to help someone else from the car while you are standing on the ground. If you do, you will become a path for electricity and could be hurt or killed!

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