Don’t Join the Electrical Circuit

If you have to rescue someone who is receiving an electric shock, be careful or you might end up becoming a shock victim yourself.

WHAT’S AT STAKE

Seeing someone being electrocuted is a horrifying experience. The victim may be “frozen” to the energized line or equipment, and unable to let go. The tendency to just rush in and try to save the person will be strong but you must not touch the victim until you are sure the power source has been shut off or the victim is no longer connected to the power circuit.

WHAT CAN GO WRONG

While hanging a banner at an athletic field, a young construction worker was atop of a 25- to 35-foot scaffold and came in contact with overhead wires. As he was being electrocuted, a second worker ran to his aid. After climbed onto the scaffolding, he too was shocked and thrown 30 feet onto the ground. The first man was declared dead at the scene, and the second was hospitalized with severe burns and injuries from the fall.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

For your own safety, always try to de-energize before attempting any rescue. Do not touch the energized equipment or tool until you unplug it, throw a breaker or otherwise disconnect the power source.

If you must pull the victim away from an active power source, here are some suggestions on how to protect yourself. Please note there may be many exceptions to the following general guidelines, especially in the case of high voltage incidents:

- Isolate the hazard – make sure no one else encounters the power source.
- Warn everyone away from the area until it is safe.
- Make sure your hands are dry and that you are standing on a dry surface.
- Use a non-conducting device such as an unpainted board, a rubber or plastic pipe and stay as far away from the victim and the power source as possible. Never use anything that is damp or that contains metal.

- After you push or pull the victim to safety, begin CPR immediately and carry it out until medical help arrives.

Let’s take a moment and review some of the safety rules for preventing electric shock:

- Be alert to signs of electrical malfunction including damaged or worn equipment, sparking, equipment which has been allowed to get wet and equipment which is showing other signs of overheating.
- Do not use damaged tools, equipment, cords or connections. Report these problems immediately.
- Do not make unauthorized electrical repairs to any equipment or circuitry.
- When you must use power tools or other electrical equipment outdoors or in damp conditions, make sure you are protected by a GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter).
- Wear appropriate PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) around electrical installations and equipment. This might include special PPE such as a non-conductive hard hat, special footwear, and rubber gloves.
- Strictly observe warning signs regarding electrical hazards, including those cautioning you to stay away from high voltage installations.
- Do not use a metal ladder around electrical fixtures. Not even if it is to change a lightbulb.
- Extension cords are meant to be used only temporarily. Never make them permanent and do not allow them to become damaged by wear from traffic.

FINAL WORD

Be very careful if you must rescue someone who is receiving an electrical shock, be very careful that you do not become a victim too.