Downed Power Line Electrocutes Deputy Sheriff



Deputy Sheriff Tony* was quite certain that the downed power line hanging only a few inches above the road was a ground wire that was safe to move by hand. He couldn’t have been more wrong.

In a flash of sparks, Tony was electrocuted and thrown over the bank by a jolt of electricity. He was later pronounced dead at the hospital.

WHAT HAPPENED
A car struck a utility pole at a curve on a US highway, resulting in the primary (hot) wire drooping to within inches of the roadway.

A state trooper arrested the motorist for drunk driving, secured the area and began directing traffic with the help of a civilian. The local utility company had been notified of the car crash and the downed wire. As the traffic load increased, the trooper called the local sheriff’s department for assistance. Tony arrived shortly after and began assisting the trooper.

During a discussion, Tony assured the trooper that the downed power line was only a ground wire because it was not wrapped with insulation. Therefore, it could be moved safely. Tony then grabbed the wire and carried it to the side of the road. Seconds later there was a flash. A witness stated that the deputy sheriff stepped off the road and onto a wet berm when the “line got him.” The electrical current sent Tony tumbling over the bank, and the line swung back to its previous position. Why the deputy was not electrocuted when he initially grasped the energized line is unknown. It is suspected that he may not have created a path to ground until the soles of his shoes were moistened by the wet berm.

WORKERS TAKE HEED
Employees should follow these recommendations to prevent similar deaths associated with downed power lines:

- Workers should not perform tasks until they have been properly trained (including simulation training) to identify and control the hazards involved.
- Workers assigned responsibility to coordinate activities at an incident

site should follow established safety procedures. Tony had received two weeks of law enforcement training, including instruction in power line safety procedures. These procedures require that a utility company be called to de-energize downed power lines before they are moved or contacted.

* *The names aren’t real, but the incidents are. These accounts are based on actual fatality investigations.*