

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Tree in Powerline

Date: August 6, 2018

Location: Miriam Fire, White Pass, Washington

What would you do if you witnessed a tree or other object strike a powerline?

While improving a contingency line along an established road for a potential burnout operation, a standing tree made contact with a charged high voltage powerline when a logging deck of previously felled trees was bumped by a dozer.

The logging deck, located next to the road, was shoved into a standing tree, pushing the tree over until it made contact with the powerline. No personnel were injured and no fire was started.

When the line was contacted, power to the community of White Pass was disrupted, including power to the Miriam Fire's Incident Command Post. Fortunately, the building being used as the ICP was equipped with a large auto-start generator.

Incident Personnel Search for Power Outage Source

Initially, no one on the incident knew the powerline had been contacted by the standing tree. This situation was not realized until the local power company contacted the ICP to see if the incident personnel knew anything about the power outage. At that time, incident personnel started looking for the source of the power outage.

The movement of the tree into the powerline was minimal and, therefore, had initially not been noticed by those clearing the contingency line. After the incident-assigned resources found the tree, the utility company was contacted and the incident-assigned resources guided the utility crew to the tree.

The utility crew removed the standing tree lodged in the line without incident and restored power to the community of White Pass and to the ICP.



This photo, taken after the tree was removed by the utility crew, shows where the tree made contact and became lodged on the charged high voltage powerline.

Contributing Factors

- ❖ During PL5, resources are often spread thin and little things and big things fall through the cracks. Resources end up covering large areas and may not gain the full-sight picture necessary to see every hazard.
- ❖ When we come together on an incident, we have limited time to “size-up” one another. While we have trust built within the system, we rarely get the chance to fully vet people out and have conversations about speaking up when a hazard is present.

- ❖ The Incident Management Team was clear in that they want everyone to speak up, but they also acknowledge that, at times, people or crews do not speak up for various reasons. These reasons include—but are not limited to—the conversations surrounding the “Contractor Dilemma” syndrome. For more information and discussion on this “Contractor Dilemma” check out this podcast:

<https://wildfirelessons.podbean.com/e/the-contractors-dilema/>

LESSONS

- ✓ Work with a local utility company prior to the start of your season for training on interactions around hazards such as powerlines, gas lines, communication lines, etc.
- ✓ Always: Look out for powerlines near your incident. Communicate the location of all powerlines that present a hazard. Escape Routes should not be under or near overhead powerlines. Safety Zones, ICP, and staging areas should not be located under or near overhead powerlines (IRPG pg. 24-25).
- ✓ Error on the side of caution when interacting with hazards. Remember: We are all a Safety Officer and have the chance to speak up when we see hazards. Take the time to stop and discuss the hazards in front of you and how to mitigate them.
- ✓ Encourage open communication and discuss “just-in-case” scenarios to evaluate all known risks and hazards. Maintain a full sight of the hazards. Or, if unable to do so, keep a spotter nearby to help identify them.
- ✓ Before beginning your work around powerlines, it’s important to communicate with local utility companies to determine if the powerline is active.
- ✓ Where it is difficult to maintain a visual distance between equipment and powerlines, designate a person to observe, and give the operator a timely warning in order to maintain the required clearance of 10 feet.
- ✓ If you are working within 10 feet—or under—the powerline, the utility company shall be notified to remove the line from service before you begin your work.
- ✓ Prior to implementing your work, familiarize all involved employees with the safety requirements associated with the specific nature of your work. For more information:
https://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owadisp.show_document?p_table=STANDARDS&p_id=10767



This RLS was submitted by:

**PNW RLS Team: Tristan Fluharty,
Damen Therkildsen,
and Brenten Lavelle –
with support from the Pacific
Northwest Coordination Group.**

Do you have a Rapid Lesson to share?
Click this button:

[Share
Your Lessons](#)