Talking Points

What to Do in Vehicle Accidents That Involve Power Lines

Instincts can help us to avoid danger but in some situations, our natural inclinations can lead to tragic results. If your car hits a utility pole or otherwise brings a power line down, getting out of a vehicle, with few exceptions, is the *wrong* thing to do until the line has been de-energized. Know the right steps to take to save your life:

- You are almost always better off to stay in the car, especially if the line is in contact with the vehicle.

- Call or signal for help. It is safe to use a cell phone.

- Warn others who may be nearby to stay away, and wait until the electric utility arrives to make sure power to the line is cut off.

- If the power line is still energized and you step outside, your body becomes the path to ground for that electricity, and electrocution is the tragic result. Wait until the electric utility arrives and shuts off the power.

- The only exception would be if fire or other danger, like the smell of gasoline, is present. In that case, the proper action is to jump—not step—with both feet hitting the ground at the same time. Jump clear. Do not allow any part of your body to touch the vehicle and ground at the same time. Hop to safety, keeping both feet together as you leave the area. Like ripples in a pond or lake, the voltage diminishes the farther out it is from the source. Stepping from one voltage level to another allows the body to become a path for that electricity.

- Even if a power line has landed on the ground, there is still the potential for the area near your car to be energized. Stay inside the vehicle unless there is fire or imminent risk of fire.

- The same rules apply with situations involving farm equipment and construction equipment that comes in contact with overhead lines. Those working with large equipment should stay inside the vehicle if equipment extensions come in contact with power lines.

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