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Report of the Week

All I saw was a big spark of blue...

1/21/2010

Report Number: 09-0000159

Report Date: 02/07/2009 00:11

Synopsis

Leave the electric to the professionals!

Demographics

Department type: Volunteer

Job or rank: Other: medical officer

Department shift: Respond from home

Age: 16 - 24

Years of fire service experience: 4 - 6

Region: FEMA Region III

Service Area: Rural

Event Information

Event type: Fire emergency event: structure fire, vehicle fire, wildland fire, etc.

Event date and time: 02/04/2009 01:30

Hours into the shift:

Event participation: Involved in the event

Weather at time of event: Cloudy and Snow

Do you think this will happen again?

What were the contributing factors?

- Human Error
- Individual Action

What do you believe is the loss potential?

- Life threatening injury

Event Description

We were responding to a trailer fire in a rural part of the county. Snow had covered the roads. The Onspots chains had to be dropped in order to get there. There was approximately 5 inches of snow on the road and it was about five degrees outside.

Upon arrival on the scene, we had a fully involved trailer fire. Two other stations were toned for water and manpower. The power and gas were still on to the structure. The ETA for the Electric Company was over an hour. Because of the ETA, I went to the meter box and opened it to pull the meter. I have seen meters pulled numerous times. When I reached to grab the meter to pull it out, my fire gloves were wet and they made a connection with the prongs on back of meter. All I saw was a big spark of blue and felt a tingling sensation going up my arm and into my chest. I was knocked to the ground.

I was not injured but did have a tingling sensation in arms and fingers for rest of the night. This was an honest mistake and I wanted to prevent my fellow

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firefighters from getting electrocuted by the power lines that were down everywhere. I feel lucky that I walk away with no injuries and I hope this story will prevent anyone else from making a careless mistake. Leave the electricity to the professionals!

Lessons Learned

Leave the electric to the professionals!

Discussion Questions

Policies on "pulling the meter" need to be visited frequently and reviewed with the local utility company. A generation ago fire departments routinely carried linesman's gloves and pulled meters as a matter of routine. A recent review of policies across the country finds that many fire departments leave "pulling the meter" to the local utility company. In addition, many utility companies recommend leaving the meter to the utility company due to changes in meter configuration and function. Once you have read the entire report contained in [09-159](#), consider the following: (Linked below are the Related Reports)

1. Survey your first due area. How many different meter configurations are out there?
2. If your department allows meters to be pulled, how old is the written policy and when was the last time it was reviewed?
3. Is your local utility company aware of your department's policy on pulling electric meters?
4. If you run mutual aid, does your practice of controlling utilities match the practices of your surrounding departments?
5. What other options are available for controlling power at a structure fire?

Related Reports – Topical Relation: Controlling Utilities

[05-489](#)

[06-025](#)

[07-805](#)

[08-308](#)

Note: The questions posed by the reviewers are designed to generate discussion and thought in the name of promoting firefighter safety. They are not intended to pass judgment on the actions and performance of individuals in the reports.