

Debunking myths about electricity

When it comes to electricity, what you don't know can kill you.

Sometimes we think we've got the facts but all we know are popular myths perpetuated by social media, movie exaggerations and unreliable sources.

That old saying 'knowledge is power' is very true, especially when electric power is involved. That's why we take every opportunity we can to educate our consumers, young people and other folks in the community about electric safety.

One myth that could be particularly dangerous this time of year is the one suggesting that when a power line falls on the ground, it automatically becomes dead. You should always stay away, 30 feet or so, even if you don't see sparks.

Assume a downed line is a live line. Call your electric cooperative or 911 immediately when you see a downed line so trained personnel can take care of the problem.

Along that same line: If you're in a car that strikes a utility pole, stay in the car, call 911 and wait until the utility workers tell you it's safe. Dropped power lines are hard to see, especially at dusk or at night. Stepping from your car may create a path to ground for electricity or you may walk into a fallen line and be electrocuted.

Among other electricity myths:

MYTH: Rubber gloves and rubber shoes protect you from electricity.

TRUTH: That's true only if they are **100 percent pure rubber with no holes or tears** (the kind that electric lineworkers wear and are regularly inspected). The gloves a lineman wears are laboratory tested to withstand 20,000 volts. Typical cleaning gloves and shoes, which are made with rubber mixed with cheaper materials, aren't going to protect you in an electrical encounter.



MYTH: All power lines are insulated.

TRUTH: As a rule, **power lines aren't insulated.** So, how come birds don't get electrocuted when they perch on a power line? They don't provide a path to the ground for electricity flow. If a bird were to touch two wires at once, or a wire and the ground, it would be electrocuted.

MYTH: Power lines outside carry the same 120-volt electricity we use in our homes.

TRUTH: Here in Indiana, **most power lines carry 7,200 volts.** Some carry up to 19,000 volts. You can't tell the voltage by just looking at it.

3 MISTRUTHS ABOUT ELECTRICITY

Power lines are insulated.

NOT TRUE:

At least 90% of them are NOT insulated. Ones that might have been insulated could have lost insulation as a result of years of being exposed to the sun and weather.

If a power line is not high voltage, it's safe.

NOT TRUE:

Despite what you may hear, voltage won't kill you, amperage will. Just 1 amp will cause fatal heart irregularities. Between 100 and 200 amps run through an average house.

A live wire will always spark when it fails.

NOT TRUE:

Sometimes, but not always. When the line makes firm contact, it will spark. If it doesn't make firm contact, it won't ... but it could still be carrying its electrical charge and kill you.