



To: All Fire Chiefs in British Columbia ¹
From: Fire Chiefs' Association of BC / BC Hydro Task Force
Date: December 2009
Subject: Management of downed power lines during high call volume (storm) events

Major winter storm events have occurred with increasing frequency and impact. In the winter of 2006/2007, for example, more than 500 electrical distribution circuits were impacted, exhausting the capacities of both Fire Service and BC Hydro crews to respond effectively to mitigate hazards to public safety associated with downed power lines. These storms brought to the forefront the need to strengthen partnerships between BC Hydro and the Fire Service.

In March 2007, a Task Force was formed with representatives from the Fire Chiefs' Association of B.C. and BC Hydro. The objective was to develop an action plan to improve each organization's preparedness for and response to storm events involving downed power lines, and to identify ways to minimize interactions between the public and downed lines that could lead to serious injury or fatality.

Attached are the final Task Force report and a summary of the status of progress to-date on selected recommendations. The report includes recommendations in the areas of: education and awareness; communications and coordination; operations; and finances. Included in the report appendices are:

- Sample fire department operational guidelines
- Resource triage simulation exercise
- Legal opinion to Surrey Fire on the application of the report recommendations
- Barrier tape for downed lines

Release of this final report was delayed as a result of continuing efforts to resolve the issue of finances associated with extraordinary costs incurred by fire departments in standing by downed power lines. Although this issue has not been resolved, Task Force representatives decided that the report should be released so that all parties can benefit from the good work that has been accomplished to-date. The Task Force will continue to discuss potential options for recovery of specified costs that will be mutually acceptable to Fire Services and BC Hydro.

If a local government intends to follow the recommendations in the report with respect to downed power lines, the elected body should adopt the recommendations as a corporate policy and the Fire Department should consider adopting and implementing the sample Operational Guidelines and associated training programs as their foundation to a safe and effective

¹ **Note:** If your fire department is located outside BC Hydro's service area, it is suggested that you contact your local electrical utility to discuss management of downed lines during major storm events.

response. In this regard, the Task Force strongly recommends that each community seek their own legal advice (due diligence) in order to protect the interests of their own community.

If the local authority that has jurisdiction decides that a change to the current policy regarding downed power lines and high call volume events may be of interest in their community, the Fire Chief should consider carrying out the following:

- 1) Read the Task Force Report and Status of Progress on Recommendations
- 2) Read the associated Operational Guidelines to determine if these are appropriate for your jurisdiction and consult with your-City/Regional Management Team to determine if support for this initiative can be acquired with the governing body.
- 3) Conduct knowledge and skills assessments of your department and, if needed, contact the Electrical Industry Training Institute (EITI) to register your Fire Training Officer for the train-the-trainer course, which is offered free-of-charge by BC Hydro. A better understanding of electrical emergencies will benefit fire fighters and the public.
- 4) Determine your current call capacity during major storm events by conducting a high call volume event exercise by using the resource triage simulation exercise, which includes call and resource cards. Run through the exercise twice, changing your call-out policies.
- 5) Conduct a resource and cost assessment to determine if your department is capable of protecting multiple scenes of electrical emergencies on all sides using your existing traffic cone and barrier tape supplies. Are you able to illuminate the scene at night to warn on-coming traffic? (e.g., using strobe lights or light sticks)
- 6) To confirm use and access to the 'BC Hydro - Emergency Services' web interface by the Fire Dispatch service in your area, contact your Fire Dispatch service, which in turn can consult with the Association of 911 Agencies of BC.

Information and materials required to implement the report recommendations are included in the report. These materials will also be available on the Fire Chiefs' Association of B.C. website.

Your feedback on this initiative is welcome and may be provided through the Fire Chiefs' Association of B.C. to the Task Force.

Sincerely,



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