



First Responder Beware[®] Electrical Safety

Trainer's Guide

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Introduction

The *First Responder Beware* awareness program is designed to provide firefighters, police, EMTs, and paramedics with the information they need to recognize and work safely around electrical infrastructure while responding to emergencies.

This trainer's guide will help you make the most of the *First Responder Beware* program. It contains six sections:

- **Know Your Audience.** An overview of first responders' learning preferences.
- **Electricity Basics.** Information on how electricity works.
- **Plan Your Session.** Tips for preparing an effective awareness session.
- **Five Steps for an Effective Safety Session.** Step-by-step trainer's guidance.
- **Suggested Simulations.** Activities to help reinforce safety procedures.
- **First Responder Beware Electrical Safety Quiz.** Reproducible electrical safety quiz to help trainers and participants evaluate the program's impact. Answers are provided.

Section One: Know Your Audience

Understanding how first responders learn best will help you tailor your awareness session to this unique audience. Take into consideration the following learning preferences:

- **First responders tend to be action-oriented learners** who do best when given an opportunity to practice and repeat recommended behaviors, and they favor a hands-on approach.
- **First responders benefit from significant discussion time**, including opportunities to relate new information to prior experiences and events.
- **First responders are very focused on core priorities:** their own survival, safe and timely rescue of incident victims, and protection of property.
- **First responders respect authority and expertise.** Instructors should have a solid command of the topic and be well organized.
- **First responders are conscientious learners.** If the material is presented as being important to their work and lives, they will be a responsive, eager, and respectful audience.
- **First responders prefer practical (rather than theoretical) information.** Keep the focus on real-life situations.

Section Two: Electricity Basics

This section will help trainers answer questions about electricity from session participants. If you need additional information, please contact the local electric utility before your awareness session.

What Is Electricity?

Electricity results from the flow of electrons between atoms that occurs when atoms carry different charges. Electrons are negatively charged and flow to positively charged atoms until the charge is level or neutral.

- The flow of electrons is called **current**.
- The force propelling the flow of electrons is measured in **voltage**, or **volts** for short.
- The rate at which electricity moves is called **amperes**, or **amps** for short.

- When an object or substance limits the flow of current, this property is called **resistance**. Resistance is measured in **ohms**.
- Materials with a high level of resistance are called **insulators**. Common insulators include plastic, rubber, paper, and air. These materials do not allow electricity to pass through them easily. (However, even insulators can conduct electricity under certain conditions.)
- Materials with a low level of resistance are called **conductors**. Common conductors include water, most metals, and the human body. Electricity can pass easily through these materials under almost all conditions.

How Does Electricity Work?

Electricity is generated at power plants. A thick coil of wire spins inside giant magnets at the plant, moving the electrons in the wire and making electricity flow.

Wires on tall transmission towers carry high-voltage electricity from power plants to substations, where the voltage is reduced. From substations, electricity travels on smaller wires that branch out down streets, either overhead or underground.

Overhead and underground power lines carry electricity to transformers on poles or on the ground, where the voltage is reduced again to a level that is safe for typical use. From transformers, electricity travels into buildings through service drop wires. These connect to the meter and to all the wires that run inside walls to outlets and switches.

Note that electric-line workers receive extensive training and are experts in handling power lines. They also have special equipment for handling electric infrastructure. First responders should understand that even with safety instruction, their understanding of electricity is basic, and their equipment, even if it appears insulated, is not designed or tested to prevent electric shock.

Section Three: Plan Your Session

A well organized, informed instructor will gain participants' respect and be far more effective. Below are some recommendations to help you prepare for the electrical safety awareness session with confidence.

Know Your Material

Always preview the materials before showing them to session participants. Gathering information in advance can be useful and make awareness materials more relevant. Review all the materials and rehearse your presentation well before the session.

Make the Material Relevant

Identify the key electrical infrastructure that first responders in your awareness session may encounter when responding to emergencies, and focus the group's attention on these topics:

- **What emergency situations** bring them close to downed power lines?
- **What type of long or tall equipment do they use** that might come in contact with overhead power lines?
- **Where are the electric substations** in your area?
- **What electrical hazards have participants encountered** in the past? Recently?
- **What experience do participants have with electric shock victims** and how much do they know about the severity, nature, and proper response to shock and burn injuries?

Tailor the Session to the Meeting Space, Audience Size, and Allotted Time

Consider the size of the meeting space and audience. A large group will require different media than will a smaller one. If the room size is very large for the group, be sure it is arranged as intimately as possible to keep all participants involved.

Remember that first responders are hands-on, action-oriented learners. The session will need to include opportunities to simulate recommended practices and to discuss potential applications of the material. Room size and arrangement can have a measurable impact on the participation level. Consider:

- **Will all materials be visible** to all participants or do you need additional space or equipment?
- **Are the seats arranged in a way** that will foster discussion?
- **Is there adequate space** for participants to conduct simulations?
- **Is there adequate lighting** for all participants to see the instructor and materials and to take notes if necessary?
- **Will everyone be able to hear?**

Just as room and audience size can impact the effectiveness, so can session time. No one learns well sitting for long periods. On the other hand, cramming too much information into a short session can reduce retention. Plan your session to allow time for discussions and simulations. If there is not time for all the materials, which ones will be most effective for these participants?

Section Four: Five Steps for an Effective Safety Session

Follow these steps for a high-impact meeting that will keep participants involved and reinforce essential safety information:

1) Advertise the Meeting

Post a notice well in advance of the meeting in a highly visible location.

2) Pass a Sign-In Sheet

Keep attendance records of all safety meetings because, some day, you may have to show who attended the meeting, what the session covered, and when it was held.

3) Offer an Overview

Tell participants what you will cover in the meeting and what you hope they will learn. This is a good time to convey the importance of this information—that it can help protect first responders, incident victims, and bystanders from electricity-related injury or death.

4) Present the First Responder Beware Materials

Discuss the electrical safety information in these materials and what electricity-related emergencies participants might encounter. Ask participants to review their notes on the materials periodically to refresh their memory of the vital safety tips.

These materials use different types of first responders to exemplify different situations. You might preface them by pointing out that first responders of any discipline could be first on the scene in any emergency. Ask participants to pay special attention to how the information can be applied to their areas of expertise and emergencies they will encounter.

5) Discussion and Simulation

Participants will retain more information if they get involved in activities and discussions. Ideally, these exercises should be dispersed throughout the session. Here are some ideas:

- **Remind participants of the circumstances of any electricity-related emergencies in your region.** Discuss how information in the materials is relevant.
- **Stress the importance of first responders keeping themselves, their tools, their equipment, and their vehicles *at least* 10 feet* from overhead power lines.** Discuss how this rule particularly applies to them and situations they may encounter. Also discuss how downed lines require 30-foot to 100-foot clearances because wires can jump and move with wind or when sparking, and because the ground may be energized. Stress also that even though some power lines may appear to be insulated, they are not. Their coating is only weatherproofing and is not designed to protect anyone from electric shock.
**Higher voltages require greater clearances; please check with the local electric utility if you are unsure about the clearances for various types of lines in your area.*
- **Invite first responders to ask questions** about the materials and the safety procedures they outline. If they have questions you can't answer, research the answers yourself and give them that information as soon as possible.
- **Ask participants to brainstorm a list of key safety issues** identified in the materials. Review these key issues, and discuss incidents that resulted when related safety precautions were ignored. What were the consequences?
- **Conduct tabletop simulations of various emergency scenarios.** Use toy vehicles and figures to simulate appropriate actions: where to park, how to manage aerial equipment, and where to place emergency personnel and bystanders. Remind participants to make sure there is a clear path to the incident site for utility vehicles and personnel.
- **Ask each participant to name one thing they learned** from the materials or discussion that will help them be safer in the future.

Section Five: Suggested Simulations

Practice is essential to first responders' survival and the successful resolution of emergency situations. There is often little time to think, and proper habits can save lives.

Tabletop Simulations

The use of tabletop models provides opportunity for small-group collaborations and for simulating multiple scenarios. This approach can be adapted to various room conditions and time constraints. Use of toy figures and scale models allows simulations to be easily reset for repetition. Possible scenarios include the following:

- **Stage a car accident using toy cars and small wires.** Have participants use toy figures to act out proper procedures, beginning with arrival on the scene through a rescue of the occupants in an energized vehicle.
- **Simulate conditions after a serious storm where lines have fallen.** Use figures to practice proper procedures.
- **Practice where to park, how to manage aerial equipment around overhead lines, and where to place emergency personnel and bystanders** using toy fire trucks, police cars, and ambulances. Be sure to include a spotter and discuss how only a spotter on the ground can accurately judge distances between overhead power lines and aerial equipment.

- **Stage a variety of electrical infrastructure fires.** These could involve a substation, a power line or an underground vault. Ask participants to use figures to demonstrate appropriate actions.
- **Place model infrastructure items such as electric meters, service drops, etc.,** around structures, and ask participants to “arrive” at that scene and identify these pieces of electrical infrastructure.
- **Describe a scenario where a fire or other emergency is taking place.** Have participants demonstrate proper procedures for different electrical infrastructure items.

Role-Play Simulations

Role-play simulations are ideal for practicing first-aid techniques and detailed physical actions.

- **Practice proper jump-and-shuffle technique** for exiting energized equipment. Jump clear of the vehicle or equipment with your feet together. Do not touch the equipment and the ground at the same time, or you will become electricity’s path to the ground and could be killed. Land with your feet together and shuffle away, keeping your feet close together and on the ground at all times. Do not run or take long steps; if your legs bridge two areas of the ground with different voltage, electricity could travel up one leg and down the other. (This is because electricity spreads out in the ground with decreasing voltage from the point of contact.)
- **Place signs around the room that read “electric meter,” “downed wires,” and “overhead lines,”** and have participants enter the room. Time how long it takes them to locate the infrastructure and respond appropriately.
- **Practice responding to a vehicle/pole incident** where downed power lines are known or suspected. Emphasize that participants should not touch the vehicle or the power line.

Remember that simulations are intended to reinforce proper behavior—*not* to call out or embarrass participants. Maintain a cooperative, supportive atmosphere at all times, and encourage participants to ask questions and provide feedback about how simulations might be most effective.

Section Six: First Responder Beware Electrical Safety Quiz

The quiz on the next page is intended to help instructors and participants gauge the program’s effectiveness. By administering it before beginning the session and then at the end of the session, trainers and participants alike can observe learning in action. The quiz is designed for two-sided photocopying.

Electrical Safety Quiz Answers

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. D |
| 2. D | 7. A |
| 3. A | 8. D |
| 4. A | 9. D |
| 5. B | 10. B |

Name: _____

Date: _____

First Responder Beware Electrical Safety Quiz

Before

Questions

After

_____ **1. Which of the following should you do when you suspect electrical infrastructure is involved in a fire?** _____

- A. Attempt to disconnect electric service
- B. Contact the local electric utility
- C. Secure the area and evacuate bystanders
- D. Both B and C

_____ **2. Which of your standard-issue protective gear will reliably insulate you against electric shock?** _____

- A. Your gloves
- B. Your helmet
- C. Your boots
- D. None of the above

_____ **3. What is the *minimum* safe clearance between overhead power lines and emergency equipment?** _____

- A. 10 feet
- B. 100 feet
- C. 6 inches
- D. 200 feet

_____ **4. True or false? You cannot always tell whether power lines or objects are energized.** _____

- A. True
- B. False

_____ **5. How should you assist someone who is in a vehicle that is in contact with downed power lines?** _____

- A. Lift them out of the vehicle
- B. If they are in imminent danger, instruct them how to safely jump clear of the vehicle and shuffle away
- C. Pull them out with a non-conductive rope
- D. Encourage them to exit the vehicle normally

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6. When is it appropriate to disconnect electrical service?

- A. When you can reach the electric meter
- B. When you can cut power lines
- C. When you can access a manhole
- D. Never

7. True or false? Your body can conduct electricity.

- A. True
- B. False

8. If your equipment contacts a power line and you are not in imminent danger, you should

- A. If possible, safely move the equipment away from the line
- B. Stay put and warn others to stay away
- C. Have someone contact the local electric utility
- D. All of the above

9. If a substation or transformer is burning, you should

- A. Enter the substation unescorted
- B. Evacuate the area
- C. Protect area exposures
- D. Both B and C

10. True or false? Burning electrical equipment is difficult to replace and should be saved.

- A. True
- B. False