

Alton Power Pole Incident Sparks Release Of Safety Information From Ameren Illinois

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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COLLINSVILLE - Each year in Illinois, the Illinois Department of Transportation reports there are 3,000-3,500 power poles that vehicles come in contact with, and many leave the scene.

Brian Bretsch, communications executive for Ameren Illinois, said total power pole strikes increases when the inclement weather of winter comes with ice and snow roadway situations.

“The majority of the time, it knocks the power out when someone strikes a power pole,” Bretsch said. “About two or three years ago, someone in the Alton area hit a transmission pole and 6,000 customers were without power.”

Bretsch said Ameren Illinois responds as soon as they receive the 911 call to the scene. When a power line is struck, motorists should remain in the vehicle under almost all circumstances. Bretsch said the only time occupants should exit before Ameren Illinois arrives is if the automobile begins to smoke or catches fire after being hit. Details of what to do if the vehicle catches fire after striking a power pole are explained below in safety tips.



These Are Vehicle Safety Tips For A Downed Power Line And Vehicle Provided By Ameren Illinois:

- Motorists across Illinois drive off the road and hit more than 3,000 power poles each year, according to the Illinois Department of Transportation.
- A downed power line that falls on or near an automobile creates a dangerous situation for both the vehicle occupants, as well as Good Samaritans looking to assist. One does not have to physically touch a downed line to be seriously injured or killed.
- The first inclination in a wreck may be to get out of the vehicle but in crashes involving a power line, remaining inside is actually the safest option. This is because a downed power line may be energized, which energizes the vehicle and the area around it. Leaving the vehicle could cause the body to become a path to ground for the electricity (causing electrocution).
- A downed line may not be arcing, sparking, or smoking but remain energized. There is no way to tell whether it's live or dead until the utility is on the scene and can assure the line is no longer energized.
- When involved in such a crash, the first step is to call 911 and wait calmly inside the vehicle for emergency crews and Ameren Illinois to arrive on the scene.
- If you happen to witness a car collision with a power pole, do not approach the crash under any circumstance. You could put your life at risk by trying to help.
- Upon arriving at the scene, Ameren Illinois will secure the area and cut power, which ensures the line is de-energized. Only then is it safe for all occupants to exit the vehicle.
- The sole scenario in which occupants should exit before Ameren Illinois arrives is in the event the automobile begins to smoke or catches fire.

- If this happens, jump clear of the vehicle without touching it and the ground at the same time. Land with both feet together on the ground. Then hop or shuffle with both feet still together so there will not be a voltage difference between your feet, which would give electricity the chance to flow through your body. Hop at least 35 feet away.
- Power poles often line the sides of streets and highways. Staying alert on the road and constantly scanning for potential hazards is the best way to avoid a dangerous power line in a car crash scenario.
- Make sure to exercise caution while driving in strong winds and storms. Ameren Illinois maintains exceptionally strong and sturdy infrastructure, but every so often, a storm can cause overhead lines to topple down.
- If one of these toppled lines end up on an occupied vehicle, the same safety protocols apply. Additionally, don't drive over a downed line laying across the road.
- Never try to move a power line out of the roadway. Instead, immediately call Ameren Illinois at (800) 755-5000 to clear the hazard. Find an alternate route to your destination.

[Chris Rhodes also contributed to this story.](#)