



Downed Power Lines and Vehicle Safety

Test your knowledge – Instructor Version

On a stormy night in July, 18-year-old Kevin Nixon was behind the wheel of his 2012 Volkswagen Jetta. He had just left a friend's birthday party in the neighboring town and was heading back home, a 20-minute drive on primarily open roads. The rain was fierce, and Kevin did his best to keep his eyes focused on the road. About 10 minutes into the drive, Kevin saw headlights coming from the other direction. Initially, he thought nothing of it. But as the cars approached one another, Kevin noticed the other vehicle swerving in and out of its lane. In an attempt to avoid a head-on collision, Kevin swerved at the last moment. He was unable to regain control of the car and it ran off the road, crashing head-on into a nearby utility pole. The airbags deployed, but luckily Kevin was unhurt. As he opened the driver-side door and prepared to step out and survey the damage, he noticed what looked like downed lines draped across the hood of the car. Kevin panicked, having never experienced this situation in his young driving career.

Questions for Discussion A

- 1) **Why is this a dangerous situation?**
- 2) **What should Kevin do?**
- 3) **Are crashes involving utility poles common?**

Gina, a concerned passerby who witnessed the crash, parks her vehicle on the other side of the road and begins to approach Kevin's car to make sure he is safe. Kevin, through his window, notices Gina approaching.

Questions for Discussion B

- 1) **What should Kevin do?**
- 2) **What can happen if Gina gets too close to Kevin's vehicle?**

While waiting for help to arrive, smoke begins to pour into Kevin's vehicle, and he knows it will soon catch on fire.

Questions for Discussion C

- 1) **What are the proper steps to take in this situation? What specifically should Kevin do?**
- 2) **Aside from the presence of smoke and/or fire, are there any other situations in which Kevin should exit his car?**

Suggested discussion guidelines included on second page



Suggested Discussion Guidelines

Questions for Discussion A

Why is this a dangerous situation?

- In crashes involving power lines, the vehicle and surrounding area may become energized. This creates a dangerous situation for the driver as well as any passengers.
- One wrong move could result in a serious or even fatal injury.
- You don't have to physically touch power lines to be electrocuted.

What should Kevin do?

- Kevin should remain inside the vehicle, call 911 and wait for the power company to arrive and de-energize the lines. The power company will then inform Kevin when it is safe to exit.
- First inclination in any crash is to exit the vehicle. So in the aftermath of a crash involving power lines, it is important to understand that staying inside is actually the safest option.

Are crashes involving utility poles common?

- Yes, Ameren Illinois regularly responds to crashes involving vehicles and power lines across its service territory. In fact, statistics from the Illinois Department of Transportation show motorists across Illinois drive off the road and hit more than 3,000 power poles each year.
- The most common scenario involves a person who drives off the road and strikes a utility pole. But severe weather and strong winds can also topple poles and wires onto vehicles.
- The best way to reduce the potential for crashes involving power lines is to stay focused on the road and constantly scan for hazards.
- Avoid texting, talking on a cellphone and other distractions while driving. It is also important to not get behind the wheel if you are feeling too tired.

Questions for Discussion B

What should Kevin do?

- In crashes involving power lines, it's essential that bystanders do not approach the impacted vehicle. Kevin should roll down his window and warn Gina to stay back a safe distance.

What can happen if Gina gets too close to Kevin's vehicle?

- In crashes involving power lines, the vehicle and surrounding area may become energized. If Gina gets too close, she could be electrocuted or severely shocked. Despite wanting to help, the best thing Gina can do is call 911 from a safe distance and wait for help to arrive.



Questions for Discussion C

What are the proper steps to take in this situation? What specifically should Kevin do?

- Although first inclination might be to get out and run to safety, there is a very specific way in which Kevin must exit the vehicle in this situation.
- He should first jump out with both feet together and without touching the vehicle and ground at the same time. After landing with both feet still together, Kevin should either shuffle or bunny hop as far away as he can (35 feet at a minimum).
- Keeping both feet together throughout this entire process reduces the potential for electricity to enter Kevin's body through one foot and exit out the other. The closer Kevin's feet are, the less his chances of getting shocked.

Aside from the presence of smoke and/or fire, are there any other situations in which Kevin should exit the vehicle?

- No. Kevin should only exit the vehicle if he notices smoke or fire. Otherwise, he must remain inside the vehicle until the power company indicates it is safe to exit.