



Coweta-Fayette



powerlines

SHE DID EVERYTHING RIGHT



Safe Electricity.org®

Mary was having a good time hanging out with a friend. Realizing a storm was brewing, she pulled the weather card and used it as an excuse not to leave. As teens often do, Mary led with her most compelling reason. "Oh no, I can't come home right now. It's dangerous," referring to the half-hour drive.

Her mom, however, was not buying what Mary was selling. Karen Gehrig's maternal instinct kicked in, and like moms everywhere, she wanted her daughter home before the skies opened. Mary reluctantly headed home around 9 p.m.

On any other evening, 17-year-old Mary's protest about coming home mixed with a smidge of teenage attitude might have been nothing out of the ordinary. Everyone in the family would be safe and sound and come morning, they would make small talk over breakfast. However, on this night, the evening unfolded in a way that no one would have anticipated.

Her ride home started fine. It was raining, but nothing Mary couldn't handle. "I've never really been afraid to drive in storms; I'm pretty good with them," she explained.

But as she got closer to home, things took a turn for the worse. Mary recalls that many cars had pulled off to the side of the road due to low visibility caused by torrential rains, but since she was almost home, she thought she would keep going.

However, the storm took a drastic turn and got so bad that she was driving blind.

After she made one of her last turns onto a county road, she said that flashes of lightning illuminated glimpses of white lines in the distance,

but she could not tell what they were. As she got closer, she realized that there was nothing small about the linear obstructions strewn across the roadway.

"By the time I realized it's on the road, it's big and I was not going to (be able to) drive over it. I was like, I am going to hit this," Mary recalls. She slammed on the brakes and her car struck whatever was in the road. She said her next thought was, "Oh my gosh, what did I do."

What she hit was a massive, high-voltage transmission power line that was no longer hanging in its proper place. The wrath of the storm had damaged several structures and brought down large lines. Mother Nature's fury bent many of the transmission structures in half due to the wind shear.

Although transmission towers are designed to withstand all kinds of conditions, many were irreversibly damaged due to the storm system which became more volatile than originally forecasted.

"You're looking at all these towers, and they're doing toe touches," said Chris Gehrig, Mary's dad.

After Mary's car came to a stop, she says it began malfunctioning and was rendered undrivable. It was a life-changing moment that could have gone either way, depending on what she did next.

Fortunately, Mary's next thought was to call her parents.

"When we learned that she had hit a power line," her dad Chris recalls, he told Mary in no uncertain terms to, "Stay put. Don't move. Don't do anything. Call 9-1-1." Luckily, her phone's charge

lasted an hour or so after she hit the power line.

Fire chief Rich Schock, who was on the scene that night, said, "Those are large transmission lines with a lot of volts in them, and this could get bad fast."

Although Mary experienced a full range of emotions while waiting in her car, she could not get out and first responders could not approach it until it was confirmed that the power lines were deenergized.

If Mary would have gotten out, which she admits she did consider doing at one point, her body could have become the path to ground for the stray voltage and she could have been electrocuted. However, Mary stayed put, and the Gehrigs hope that others will learn from her experience. Her family is quick to credit everyone involved with her safe recovery.

"I think Mary did everything right," Schock said, since Mary stayed inside the vehicle until it was safe to get out.

After returning home in the early morning hours, "She was very happy, probably happier than I've ever seen her, to be home and see us," her mom Karen said.

"I feel like that energy and that fritz of 'this could be the end,' it helps you appreciate things so much more," Mary said. "Now, I drive slower. I'm more cautious, especially in the dark. I appreciate my friends and parents more. Having that kind of death-defying moment, it gets to the core of you; it gets to your heart real quick."

To watch Mary's story and to learn more, visit SafeElectricity.org.

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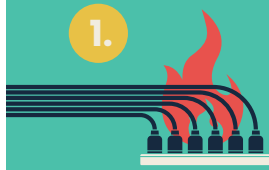



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ELECTRICITY 101


To stay safe around electricity, start with these **SEVEN** basic tips:


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1. DON'T OVERLOAD OUTLETS OR CIRCUITS
Plugging in too many items or drawing too much power on a circuit can cause overheating, fire, and damage to devices.
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2. DON'T USE FAULTY ELECTRICAL CORDS OR PLUGS
Do not use cords that look frayed, worn or cracked. Do not use broken plugs. Never remove the grounding pin from a three-pronged plug.
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3. HAVE YOUR ELECTRICIAN'S NUMBER IN YOUR PHONE
Most electrical repairs or installations are not DIY projects. Hire an expert to avoid serious injury or wiring problems.
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4. BE CAREFUL AROUND H₂O
Never use electricity while standing in damp or wet conditions. Keep all electrical devices away from water, including cell phones that are charging.
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5. EVALUATE YOUR APPLIANCES
Do not use appliances in disrepair. Older or broken appliances can overheat, start a fire, and cause serious injuries.
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6. TEST YOUR GFCIs
Outlets near a water source should be equipped with GFCIs, which help prevent shock and electrocution caused by ground faults. Test monthly to make sure they are working.
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7. MAKE SURE YOUR HOME IS UP TO CODE
Your home should be properly wired and electrically sound. Contact a reputable electrician to evaluate your home.



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The President's Message

Chris Stephens
CEO

Electricity lights homes and businesses and keeps appliances and equipment running smoothly. During Electrical Safety Month, we want to share some electrical safety tips to help you avoid hazards both inside and outdoors.

Staying safe on the road

Downed power lines can happen because of wind, storms, animals or an auto accident/collision.

1. If you see a downed power line, call 9-1-1 to report it and stay in your car. You cannot tell by looking or listening if the power line is deenergized. Wait in your vehicle until an electric utility crew member says it is safe to get out.

2. Do not drive over a downed power line. Doing so could cause a domino effect and bring down other lines, poles and equipment.

3. The only time you should exit is if your vehicle or cab is on fire. If this is the case, make a solid jump from the car or cab without touching it, landing with both feet together. Then, hop away with your feet together as far as you can.

Staying safe outside

When working outside, be aware of overhead and underground power lines.

1. Keep at least 10 feet away from overhead power lines. Keep any items you are carrying or using, such as long poles or other extended equipment, 10 feet away from power lines at all times.

2. Make sure all outside outlets are ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) protected.

3. Before digging, call 8-1-1. Buried lines such as electric, gas, water, sewer and other lines bring services indoors. Besides the dangers of coming in contact with a gas or electric line, fines due to damage are the responsibility of the homeowner or landowner.

4. When you see lightning, take shelter inside the house, shop or a hard-topped vehicle for protection. Stay away from high places, and do not take shelter under an isolated tree. Stay away from items that conduct electricity, such as metal fences. If you are swimming or in a hot tub, get out.

Staying safe inside

With so many people working from home, the workplace and where you live can be one and the same. This means more devices are plugged into outlets or circuits that may not be able to handle the load.

1. Have a qualified electrician/licensed contractor check for hazards if you notice the following: dimming lights, a sizzling or buzzing sound, the smell of warm plastic, a switch plate that feels warm or looks scorched, sparks when plugging in or unplugging items or circuits that trip often.

2. When working with electrical equipment inside the house or shop, be aware that electrical equipment can spark when flammable vapors, gases or dust are present.

3. Do not overstretch a cord or use frayed or damaged cords.

4. During storms, lightning can enter homes through corded phones, televisions, radios or computers. Lightning can also travel through plumbing, so do not take a bath, shower or wash dishes when you see lightning strikes. If possible, unplug appliances and electronics before the storm, including cell phones that are charging via electricity. Surges caused by lightning can damage electronics and appliances.

For more information on electrical safety, visit SafeElectricity.org or utility.org.