



Bureau of
Energy Resources,
United States
Department of State



National
Association of
Regulatory
Utility
Commissioners

ELECTRIC SAFETY IN PENNSYLVANIA

Lessons Learned from the *Goretzka* Case

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Background

On June 2, 2009, a 7200 volt power line fell from its pole into the yard of Carrie Goretzka.





Line Failure

- At point of connection with automatic splice
- Automatic splice-Fargo GL4042A
- Manufacturer-Hubbell Power Systems, Inc.



Automatic splice





Carrie Goretzka came into contact with the live wire in her yard.

- The downed power line caused Carrie Goretzka to fall.
- Carrie Goretzka was tangled in the line and caught fire.
- Carrie Goretzka suffered burns on 85% of her body.



Site of contact with the energized line





Carrie Goretzka died from her injuries on June 5, 2009.





Installation of the automatic splice.

- The electric utility's linemen installed the splice on June 23, 2004.
- The manufacturer of the automatic splice instructed that the splice *must* be cleaned with a wire brush.
- The electric utility's standards directed that a wire brush should be used for cleaning.



Installation (cont.)





Installation (cont.)

- The utility's standards explained the consequences of failing to perform wire brush cleaning.
- The manufacturer also stated the consequences of failing to clean with a wire brush.
- The utility's linemen were routinely trained that wire brushing did **not** have to be performed.



Installation (cont.)





Utility fails to provide information

- The Pennsylvania PUC requested information from the utility on June 4, 2009.
- The utility would not provide information.
- The Pennsylvania Public Utility Code requires utilities to furnish information in aid of investigations.



Commission Complaint

- The Pennsylvania PUC filed a formal complaint against the utility.
- The complaint charged the utility with violations of the Public Utility Code.
- Violations included failure to furnish safe facilities and failure to provide information.



Commission Complaint (cont.)

- The Commission and the utility settled the complaint.
- Utility agreed to pay requested civil penalty in full.
- The utility agreed to multiple safety enhancements.



Safety Enhancements

- Inspect automatic splices using infrared technology
- Spot check 5% of installations per year
- Track and report automatic splice failures
- Modify training programs
- Provide annual refresher training



Infrared technology





Civil Lawsuit

- The civil case in this matter resulted in the largest ever personal injury award in Pennsylvania.
- The parties settled the case for \$105 million.
- The family also sought safety provisions to ensure that this could not happen again.



Lessons Learned

- Importance of Electric Safety
- Creation of dedicated Electric Safety Division
- Pending Electric Safety regulations
- Importance of cooperation between regulatory agency and utility



Questions?

