

FACE: 85-22
DATE: June 10, 1985
CAUSE: Electrocution
SUBJECT: Fireman Electrocuted While Rappelling Down Building in West Virginia

On May 13, 1985, at 9:00 P.M. four male volunteer firefighters were removing the siren from atop their fire station. After lowering the siren 35 feet to the ground, three of the firefighters planned to rappel down the front of the building (a practice that had been done for years). The fourth firefighter, inexperienced in rappelling, was to descend by a radio transmission tower at the rear of the building, which had been used to ascend the building. The first firefighter secured his rope to a support line on the roof and leaned out over the rooftop to test the rope. One of the other firefighters reported a loud buzz and looked up to see sparks flying. The victim's back had contacted a 7,200-volt power line located 5 feet diagonally from the roof; his feet were still on the roof. The other firefighter grabbed the rope to pull the victim loose, but the victim fell to the ground. A nearby EMT was called and took the victim to the hospital, where he was pronounced DOA. Recommendations:

- o Firefighters should be trained at specified, safe locations. In this case, though the firefighters are volunteers whose time is donated, the city should provide training facilities and develop safety procedures during training. If the fire station itself is used, it should be evaluated for hazards.
- o Firefighters should be trained to recognize and appreciate hazards, and trained in preventative measures. While firefighters do receive training, apparently additional training is needed in recognizing electrical hazards. Rappelling training should address electrical hazards.