

Red River County Downed Electrical Line

Rapid Lessons Shared



Summary

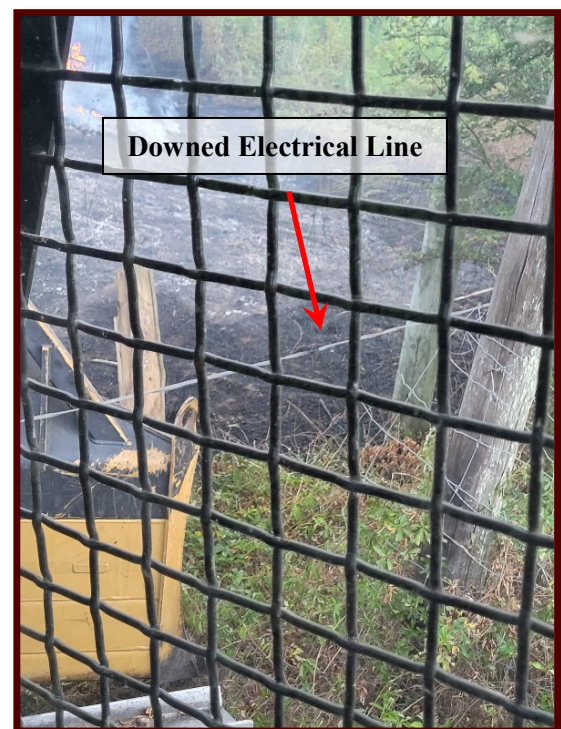
On July 27, 2022, Texas A&M Forest Service resources were requested on a small wildfire in Red River County with multiple structures threatened. While establishing dozer line through thick vegetation to stop fire progression toward a barn, a hidden, live electrical line was broken and fell between the blade and the front of the dozer. The operator was able to safely stay in the dozer while the electricity could be turned off and the electrical line removed without incident.

Narrative

Texas A&M Forest Service resources that responded to the fire were 2 type-4 tractor plows with operators and swamper, and an ICT4. Upon arrival around 19:00, the crew sized up the fire to find multiple structures threatened, moderate fire behavior, and tall grass/brush fuels. Around the threatened structures were several abandoned vehicles and fences with vegetation growing all around them, making access very difficult.

The lead dozer operator began engaging the fire and noticed a gap in a fence where their line could be tied in to cold black, which would cut the fire off from a barn. As the operator began pushing through the gap in the fence, they noticed a bright flash of light to their right. The operator immediately recognized this as arcing electricity and began reversing their dozer to escape the situation. As they reversed, the arcing electrical line fell between the blade and the front of the dozer. Realizing the line was trapped there, and continuing to move would pull the line and potentially worsen the situation, they stopped moving and idled down the dozer. The IC was then notified of the situation, and they instructed the operator to stay in the dozer and not attempt to get out. The other operator on scene was instructed to work around the disabled dozer, away from the electrical line, and continue suppression operations. The swamper for the disabled dozer was also a qualified IC, so they took over the fire while the ICT4 assumed command of the electrical incident.

The local power company was notified of the incident, and a representative was requested to come out to ensure the power to the line was disabled so it could be safely removed from the dozer. After waiting approximately 20 minutes for the power company to arrive, a VFD member that was on the scene of the fire notified the electrical incident IC that they were a certified electrician. They were able to safely disable the power to the line, and it was safely removed from the dozer. At that time, the fire had been contained, so the dozer was loaded onto its transport. There were no injuries or damage to equipment. In the following days when the fire was checked, it was presumed that the electrical line had been broken because it was grown into a juniper tree near the fence gap, and that tree had been pushed by the dozer.



Lessons Learned

- ❖ Maintain heightened situational awareness when operating heavy equipment around structures, especially old houses with grown up vegetation that could be concealing hazards.
- ❖ It is important to remain calm in stressful situations and think about your options before you act. In this situation, the operator was not able to self-extricate, so they had to rely on fellow responders to get them out of the situation safely.
- ❖ Be familiar with the best way to contact utility companies in the area. Even though the situation was resolved before the power company arrived, the electrical incident IC was able to contact them quickly to notify them of the issue.
- ❖ Utilize the qualifications of resources on scene when it can be done without compromising safety. The knowledge and abilities of an on-scene firefighter were able to be utilized to safely resolve the incident faster than waiting on the power company to arrive.