

Keeping Each Other Safe

Annual pole-top rescue training keeps linemen's rescue skills sharp

By Beth Schroder

Everyone likes to think they are prepared for an emergency. Those who are most prepared are the ones who practice the skills needed in emergencies.

The crews at Klickitat PUD take this to heart. Each year, KPUD line, construction and tree-trimming crews practice skills that could save a co-worker's life.

During the 2019 annual pole-top rescue training in July, employees improved their skills by rescuing "Joe" from a utility pole. In the case of the tree crew, it was a tree-top rescue.

Joe is a simulated victim placed in pole-climbing gear and attached to a power pole. Joe may have suffered a heart attack, stroke, contact with an electrical line or some other issue.

Employees go through a process during the training exercise to make sure all the steps are covered.

When doing a pole-top rescue, 911 is always called first so emergency help is on the way before a rescue is started. The rescuer asks for an automated external defibrillator to be available near the pole. Having an AED on hand helps if the victim has no pulse once they reach the ground.

The rescuing lineman climbs the pole and gets into a position to perform the rescue. This is the point where the lineman can determine what resources are necessary to perform the rescue.

"As a lineman, you are expected to use your normal equipment to do the rescue," says Klickitat PUD Serviceman Tim Garrigus.

Linemen are required to have a handline attached to the power pole when doing work at the pole-top level.

"The handline is generally used to pass tools and materials up and down the pole, but it can be used in an emergency to help get an injured lineman back to the ground," says KPUD Operations Manager Mark Pritchard.

Once the lineman climbs the pole, he uses the hot stick—referred to as the shotgun by linemen—to remove the electrical connection between the energized source and the work zone to make it safe to perform a rescue.

Next, the handline is tied around the victim to secure him to be lowered from the pole. The next step is cutting the skid from



Klickitat PUD Groundman Jess Beierle and crew foreman Todd Niva get Joe set up for the next round of pole-top rescue training.

the victim. The skid attaches to the climbing gear a lineman wears and then goes around the pole. Cutting the skid frees the injured lineman from the pole. Joe is then lowered to the ground using the handline.

The goal of pole-top rescue training is to get the injured lineman off the pole and to the ground as quickly and safely as possible. By achieving this, other linemen or rescue personnel can perform lifesaving measures.

While the pole-top rescue training is vital for Klickitat PUD crews, they all know the best work they do is by following established safety policies and procedures each day to make sure everyone arrives home safely. ■



Clockwise from left, Groundman Jess Beierle prepares to climb down the pole after safely lowering Joe to the ground. White Salmon crew foreman Bernie Predeek works to secure Joe with the handline before cutting the skid. Serviceman Tim Garrigus uses the shotgun to disconnect the electrical current so he can rescue Joe. Goldendale crew foreman Todd Niva wears the equipment used by linemen during pole-top rescue training. This is the same gear they wear during their normal pole-top work.

