

What to Do About Electrical Shocks and Burns

An electrical shock can severely burn you, stun your muscles and nerves or even stop your heart and breathing. Quick action in an electrical emergency can save lives. But a haphazard response can do more harm than good. Becoming familiar with the following response procedures will make it easier for you to think clearly and act decisively if an emergency occurs.

Responding to Electrical Shock

- ⚡ To protect yourself from shock, turn off the power before touching the victim or equipment.
- ⚡ If you can't turn off the power, use a nonconducting tool, such as a dry wooden stick, to move the person; then call for help.
- ⚡ Make sure you don't complete a circuit between the source and the ground.
- ⚡ If the victim is touching a power line, stay clear and call for help.
- ⚡ Before giving any treatment, check the victim's breathing and pulse.
- ⚡ If breathing has stopped, give artificial respiration.
- ⚡ If you don't detect a heartbeat, start CPR if you've been trained to do so.
- ⚡ Continue CPR until medical help arrives or until the victim begins to breathe on his or her own.

How Shock Happens

Electricity follows the easiest path to the ground. It will flow through any conductive material, such as water, metal, certain chemical solutions and the human body. If you come into contact with electricity while you're in contact with the ground, you become part of an electrical circuit and current passes through your body, causing a shock. Even a small shock can kill you if it passes through your heart and lungs. Deep internal burns can also occur.

Responding to Burns

- ⚡ Burns suffered in electrical accidents may affect your skin, muscles, organs and bones.
- ⚡ The first hour is crucial for treating burns.
- ⚡ Look for two wounds: an entrance and exit burn.
- ⚡ Treat minor burns to the skin with cool water, then cover it with a clean, dry cloth.
- ⚡ Never use ointment, ice or butter on a burn.
- ⚡ Serious burns require immediate medical attention.
- ⚡ If the victim goes into shock, keep him or her lying down with feet elevated until help arrives.
- ⚡ Never try to pull charred clothing off of burned skin.

Think Before You Act

No matter which type of electrical emergency confronts you, always stop to notice what's going on and think about a safe plan of action. Although your instinct may be to rush in and grab the person who's being shocked, that type of action could cost you your life.

