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## “I JUST WANTED TO HELP”



[“I Just Wanted to Help”](#)

by [Ken Sellars](#), on August 24, 2016

**Recently, a woman in New York City witnessed another woman fall into the energized third rail on subway tracks and receive a shock.**

Her response was compassionate and instinctive. She jumped down to push the injured woman away from the rail. But when she touched her, she received a shock herself. She described it later: “It just went right through my body. I could feel it. It was terrible.”

Her action seemed heroic, but what she did actually put herself in the same dangerous situation as the first woman. When she touched the other woman, she made herself an electrical conductor. In doing that, she allowed herself to become part of the electrical circuit, which was evident in the pain she felt. As a result of that current flow, she was left with pinprick blisters on her fingertips. And while her intentions were good, [the article](#) does not affirm that she was able to push the victim off the 750-volt direct-current third rail. It wasn't until the electricity was turned off that the woman who fell onto the rail was able to be removed from the area and treated.

The first and most important action to take in a situation like this is to **turn off the power source**. Then **call emergency services** to treat the injured person(s). At NO time should anyone try to physically remove someone from the source with his or her bare hands.

The [Mayo Clinic website gives this advice](#):

1. Don't touch the injured person if he or she is still in contact with the electrical current.
2. Call 911 or your local emergency service if the source of the burn is a high-voltage wire or lightning. Don't get near high-voltage wires until the power is turned off. Overhead power lines usually aren't insulated. Stay at least 20 feet (about 6 meters) away – farther if wires are jumping and sparking.
3. Don't move a person with an electrical injury unless he or she is in immediate danger.

**When attempting an electrical rescue, always use a nonconductive object to remove the victim from the source of power, if possible.**

This object could be something made of **wood** or **rubber** (broom, board, or rubber mat). At a construction workplace, workers are sometimes taught to use their **Class G** (2000 volt-rated) or **Class E** (20,000 volt-rated) **hardhat** to push the victim off the source. Another option is a **hook stick**, a fiberglass tool rated at 100,000 volts-per-foot, designed specifically to pull someone off and away from the source of electricity.



Our purpose in bringing some light to this story is to remind the public of the hazard and educate them on the right way to help someone getting shocked. It is understandable that someone would want to risk his or her own life in order to try and save someone else. In the case of electrical shock, however, don't let yourself become the next victim.

**What do I do if I see a downed power line?**

- See [what to do when you're around a downed power line](#)