

## West Drayton Wire Problem Could Have Been Avoided



(C. Proxmire, Ferndale 115 News, Aug. 3, 2012)

When a transformer on W. Drayton overheated, the series of events that followed could have been avoided had DTE cut the power and fixed the problem when it first came up, said Ferndale Fire Chief Kevin Sullivan. "But they are overworked and short staffed with all these problems," he added in their defense.

Around 3pm on Friday, July 27 neighbors reported smoke coming from the transformer, which was mounted on a wooden electrical pole in a resident's back yard. People in the surrounding homes were evacuated while Ferndale firemen monitored the situation, waiting for DTE to come.

Turns out that the transformer was shorting out through the bolts holding it on to the pole, causing the wooden pole to burn from the inside out. As the pole smoldered, the transformer stopped working. The wires that would normally be regulated by the transformer started to heat past capacity. Sullivan explained that copper expands when it gets overheated. Because of this, the wires started to sag. Normally wires are strung with good distance between them, but when they droop and get too close, the electricity flowing through them can arc, causing further damage to the wires and creating hazard for people or items nearby.

 Typically the Fire Department waits for DTE to shut off the power before going near wires, unless there is an immediate concern. When the electrical pole burned through, the top of it toppled over, creating havoc with arcing wires, and electricity surging through cable and phone wires as well. The transformer itself came crashing down, landing on a metal fence with so much force and electricity that it severed the top of the metal fencepost and welded some parts of the fence together. It also broken open, spilling burnt oil onto the

soil.

Of the tangled mess of wires, one fell on a person's garage, and though the garage itself was properly grounded, the electricity found its way underground through another wire that it was touching, and back into the person's home. Inside firefighters could hear the surging of electricity and the pops of the home's electrical box being destroyed. The wire on the garage also had begun burning a hole through the wall.

"We had to get that wire off the garage," Sullivan said. He explained how he put on special protective gear and use a special [hot-stick clamp](#) to move the live wire. The clamp was burned where the electricity was arcing through it.

Eventually DTE came, the power was cut, and over the weekend the wires were fixed and electricity restored.

Sullivan stressed that downed wires should be treated as dangerous, even if they aren't sparking or smoking. "You don't know when one could be live," he said. He urged residents to call the Fire Department at (248) 546-2510 if they suspect any downed wires. Also don't use anything that is wired in a questionable situation. That includes telephones, cable, television or anything that's plugged in.

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