Glow Control in CCA Poles

CCA poles are typically more difficult to ignite than poles preserved with other treatments, but they are also more difficult to extinguish. There has been concern over the "glowing" characteristics of these poles when they are involved in hot fires. After a fire is externally extinguished, the outside of the CCA pole is charred at the base like other treated poles, but the CCA preservative in the pole can remain hot enough to cause a slow burn or "glow" of the interior wood.

It is believed that checks and resin in the heartwood may contribute to the condition. The term "glow" is used because there are no actual flames inside the pole, but the wood contains hot embers that continue to destroy the wood, much like a cigarette or charcoal. The char on the outside of the pole can act as an insulator holding in the heat, while checks can help to provide oxygen by forming "chimneys." If the conditions are right and the pole is not attended to, the pole can become completely consumed by the slow-burning fire.

Testing has indicated that in outdoor fires, smoke exposure from CCA treated wood is no more hazardous than the smoke from untreated wood. However, as with untreated wood, the inhalation of the smoke should be avoided.

If a CCA pole has been in a fire it is important to take precautions to prevent additional damage to the pole:

1. Drench the burned portion of the pole with large amounts of water or coat the area completely with a fire extinguishing medium. Be sure to inject it into the checks, at and above the burn area.

2. Scrape and remove any loose or charred wood from the burnt portions of the pole.

3. Again drench the pole, mindful that the water or extinguishing material needs to be applied into any openings of the pole surface to reach the hot interior areas.

4. Re-inspect the pole the next day to assure that wood is not hot and that no further charring of the wood has occurred. Evaluate the amount of wood loss, since this could effect the remaining strength of the pole according to the National Electric Safety Code for remaining in service.

5. Soak the pole again on the surface and within the checks.

If it is necessary to remove extinguished poles from service, discard them in accordance with state and local regulations. When these steps are followed, CCA poles should present no special problems after a fire.

Disposal of CCA-Treated Poles

Following removal from service, treated wood poles should be disposed of in accordance with federal and state requirements.

Used CCA poles are not classified as a hazardous waste and can be taken to landfills that accept material of such type and size. (Refer to 40 Code of Federal Regulations sections 261.4 exclusions.)

Used poles can be burned but only in commercial or industrial incinerators or boilers in compliance with government regulations.

If used poles are sold or made available to interested parties at no charge, a copy of the Consumer Safety Information Sheet, describing proper use and handling, should be given to anyone accepting poles. Many utilities also require recipients to sign a release form that indemnifies the utility against future liability, costs, and judgments.