

Emergency Rescue Teams Practice Life-Saving Skills

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Employees who work in the electric industry know that they are exposed to more hazards than in most other work environments. These employees must always be aware of their surroundings, take all necessary precautions and embrace a culture of safe behavior.

Discovering an injured co-worker in a remote, virtually inaccessible section of a power plant or substation is not the time to wonder how to safely rescue an individual. It is the time to put planning into action and take command of the situation. It is the place where hours of safety training gets put to the test.

Teams of South Mississippi Electric employees from the Field Operations Center, Plant Morrow, and Plant Moselle participate in annual training and practice sessions to learn how to respond to such emergency situations. ROCO, a company that SME has worked with for nearly twenty years, trains industrial employees on simple, proven techniques for executing a safe, effective response to emergency situations.

The Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) requires SME to have a qualified in-house rescue team or an arrangement with an outside source to provide rescue services due to the presence of work areas or spaces classified as permit-required confined spaces with atmospheric or physical hazards. SME has both permit required and non-permit required confined spaces. Non-permit spaces have minimal hazards; permit spaces, however, restrict access only to individuals who are qualified to enter due to a potentially hazardous atmosphere or hazardous physical configurations. (Examples of permit required spaces include the coal bunkers and ball mills at Plant Morrow.)

During sessions every year, trainers conduct instructional courses for SME's confined-space rescue teams, followed by exercises that simulate realistic emergency situations at each plant or inside large transformers at substations.

"The goal of these simulations is to train our employees in the proper rescue techniques needed to safely move an individual from a hard-to-access location to a place for 911 transport," said Roy Foster, job training and safety manager. "Our employees must sometimes work in potentially hazardous conditions and spaces, so it is imperative that we make those conditions as safe as possible and, if necessary, we must be able to provide the most skilled rescue available."

While SME rescue teams are not necessarily trained to be medical responders, they are trained to relocate individuals without creating further injuries.

Michael Truitt, a laborer at Plant Moselle, recently participated in his first ROCO training. "I initially volunteered for the training because I thought it would be a good learning experience," said Truitt. "During the training I realized the importance of the rescue teams and the need for employees to have these skills."

The training simulations include patient packaging and the use of mechanical-advantage hauling systems to raise and/or lower packaged patients. Participants must demonstrate the ability to assist in removing mannequins, or personnel from actual confined spaces or from representative confined spaces.

“We learned several skills during the training, such as proper knot tying and communication,” said Truitt. “We were able to rappel from one level to a lower level, and then be hoisted back up [to simulate transporting a rescue worker]. This part was a lot of fun. The most important skill we learned, though, was teamwork.”

“Our rescue team members have a sincere desire to be trained so that they are capable of rescuing a co-worker,” said Foster. “Since SMEPA began ROCO training in the early 1990s, our team at Plant Morrow has had two opportunities to put their skills to work rescuing contract workers—one from the precipitator and one from the boiler. The team’s skills expedited the process of seeking medical attention for the injured individuals in both cases.”

“Our employees often have to go into confined spaces around the plant, and it is very reassuring to know that there is a rescue plan in place if ever needed,” said Truitt. “ROCO is a great safety measure for SMEPA to have in place.”