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Shock from power line hospitalizes landscaper

67-year-old in critical condition following twin 7,200-volt jolts

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DAILY RECORD**

RIVERDALE -- A 67-year-old landscaper from Ringwood was in critical condition Wednesday night after he was jolted twice by a 7,200-volt power line.

Shortly after 2 p.m. Wednesday, Joseph C. Schwarz was standing in a bucket attached to a crane, about to cut the last branch from a tree in front of a small white house on Oak Street near Riverdale Elementary School, when his head touched the high-voltage line, authorities said.

Two employees of the landscaping company --Schwarz is the owner --were piling branches into a truck and immediately called for help after they heard a "buzz" and saw their boss crumple to the floor of the bucket.

Riverdale Police Sgt. James MacIntosh said that, when police and Riverdale firefighters arrived, Schwarz appeared in a daze and was trying to get to his feet.

"We yelled at him to 'stay down, stay down,' but he stood up again," MacIntosh said. That's when his head touched the power line a second time.

After the second shock, Schwarz collapsed again.

Several other emergency service squads arrived to assist, including fire departments from Butler and Pompton Lakes, first aid responders from Riverdale and paramedics from Chilton Memorial Hospital.

But none could get near Schwarz because of the possibility of an electric current running through his body and into the crane, MacIntosh said.

JCP&L was called in to shut down the power to that block before emergency crews could approach Schwarz, who remained in the bucket.

When power finally was shut off, a Butler Fire Department "tower ladder"-- which uses a bucket attached to a hydraulic crane, similar to the device Schwarz used -- carried firefighters to Schwarz, who were able to bring him down, Riverdale Fire Chief Pat Cleary said.

"He was still conscious when we loaded him into the ambulance," Cleary said.

Earlier, authorities called for a helicopter, which landed at the National Guard Armory on Newark-Pompton Turnpike, less than a mile from the scene. Schwarz was flown to

the intensive care unit at St. Barnabas Medical Center, Livingston.

A nursing supervisor at the hospital said Schwarz was being treated for burns and was in critical condition Wednesday night.

Power remained out in the neighborhood shortly after the accident Wednesday afternoon. Riverdale Elementary School, located across the street from the incident, had just let out.

As emergency crews tended to the shock victim, neighbors had gathered nearby and investigators from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration took notes.

The homeowners were not home when the accident occurred.