



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
June 11, 2010

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State Health Department Encourages Proper Reuse and Management of Damaged Utility Poles

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health is encouraging the proper reuse and management of damaged utility poles, according to Ted Poppke, environmental scientist with the Department of Health.

“Many of the utility poles that were knocked down or damaged during winter storms earlier this year are being reused by farmers, ranchers and others,” Poppke said. “While we encourage the recycling or reuse of these materials, we do want to make sure people handle them safely.”

Wood Materials

Most utility poles and cross arms have been treated by one of several methods to extend the service life of the pole. This treated wood should not be burned in open fires or in stoves, fireplaces or residential boilers because toxic chemicals may be produced as part of the smoke and ashes. In addition, treated wood should not be used where it may come into contact with humans or food sources – including playgrounds or play areas, vegetable gardens and agricultural production and storage areas – or where it may come into direct or indirect contact with drinking water supplies.

Lead

The galvanized steel pins that hold ceramic or plastic insulators on the utility poles have threads made of lead. If swallowed, lead and lead dust can cause adverse health effects, including behavioral problems, learning disabilities, miscarriage, seizures and death. Children 6 and younger and pregnant women are the most at risk for the dangers of lead.

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Anyone collecting broken utility poles or parts should handle the lead-containing metal components as little as possible. Because it is toxic, lead cannot be disposed of in the garbage or a landfill. Instead, the parts that contain lead must be separated for recycling. The Department of Health's Division of Waste Management has a list of metal recyclers who may be interested in recycling the lead. Ceramic or plastic insulators that are entirely free of metal, including lead, may be reused, recycled or disposed of in an inert or municipal solid waste landfill.

For more information or to obtain the list of metal recyclers, contact Ted Poppke, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.5166.

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