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Power company witness testifies about Hempfield woman's

An expert witness for West Penn Power Co. testified on Friday that a 7,200-volt power line might have fallen before a Hempfield woman came in contact with it outside her home in 2009.

The analysis by Catherine Ford Corrigan, a biomechanical engineer from Philadelphia, was sharply rebuked during cross-examination by the attorney for the heirs of electrocution victim Carrie Goretzka.

Goretzka, 39, died in UPMC Mercy in Pittsburgh three days after the June 2, 2009, accident.

Goretzka's family maintains in their wrongful death lawsuit against the utility company that the line failed and fell onto Goretzka as she telephoned emergency crews about a power failure.

Goretzka's family, including her husband, Michael; their daughters, Chloe, 8, and Carlie, 6; and her mother-in-law, Joann, claim the line failed because it was not properly prepared by crewmen when it was installed outside the Goretzka home on West Hempfield Drive.

On Friday, Corrigan told an Allegheny County jury that she drew her conclusions after reviewing numerous photographs from the scene, depositions of multiple trial witnesses, illustrations and incident reports, and visiting the scene.

While admitting under direct examination by West Penn attorney Avrum Levicoff "that it's difficult to be absolutely precise," she said the position of burn marks in two pine trees near where Goretzka's body was burned beneath the power lines indicated her location "just prior to the moment of contact."

Levicoff then showed a computer-generated illustration to jurors depicting Goretzka standing in the side yard of her home with the power line partially fallen.

The Goretzkas' attorney, **Shanin Specter** of Philadelphia, repeatedly attempted to discredit Corrigan's theory under cross-examination.

However, Corrigan stood by her analysis.

"So your testimony is that Carrie Goretzka is responsible for her own death ... that she was in a position to see the line and should have avoided it?" asked Specter.

"No. I have not offered that opinion," Corrigan said.

Corrigan added that she was retained by attorneys for the utility to determine Goretzka's "position just prior to contact."

Specter then showed jurors another computer-generated illustration of the accident scene from Corrigan's report that appeared to show the downed power line at the level of Goretzka's head as she talked on the phone, heading toward the power line.

"In your analysis, do you know of any condition of Carrie Goretzka that would render her incapable of recognizing a downed power line directly in front of her?" Specter asked.

Corrigan indicated she was not aware that Goretzka had any such malady when she prepared her report.

The Goretzkas are seeking unspecified damages.

The trial will enter its 11th day on Monday before Judge Michael A. Della Vecchia.