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Fire Traps Workers at Top of 213-Foot Iowa Wind Turbine

Storm Lake Pilot Tribune via Associated Press

STORM LAKE, Iowa (AP) -- A fire trapped two workers at the top of a 213-foot wind turbine until firefighters could reach them.

The electrical workers were working on a control panel inside the turbine's support tube last week when the fire broke out. They were treated at a local hospital and released.

Firefighters received a call about 7:35 p.m. on Nov. 30 that there was a fire in the MidAmerican Energy wind turbine, just south of Schaller.

Firefighter Armon Haselhoff said the doors to the turbine were shut to keep oxygen from feeding the fire, since the support tube could have acted like a chimney.

The workers were able to get fresh air through a hatch at the top of the tube, Haselhoff said.

Firefighters extinguished the blaze, which appeared to have started from a short circuit during testing.

Once the fire was under control, firefighters climbed to the top of tube to help the workers down, Haselhoff said.

Firefighter Jason Currie and another firefighter ran out of air in their packs before they reached the top, but kept going anyway.

"It got worse every level we went up," Currie said.

Firefighter Jeff Sandhoff said he and Currie had zero visibility climbing inside the tube.

"Once we climbed the tower, it was just your hands reaching in front of you," Sandhoff said.

He said firefighters had radio contact with the trapped workers.

Mark Reinders, MidAmerican spokesman, said the turbine was still under construction. The employees were from M.A. Mortenson, a General Electric subcontractor.

The fire will not delay the project, which is scheduled to be completed by the end of this year, Reinders said.

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