

FrederickNewsPost.com**Traffic, electricity disrupted in Frederick after utility pole catches fire**

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By **Brian Englar**

Traffic was snarled and power service interrupted in parts of downtown Frederick on Monday afternoon, as firefighters battled a transformer fire.

Fire and rescue personnel arrived at the first block of West Patrick Street at 1:44 p.m., finding a fire at an electrical transformer in an alley between Market Street and Maxwell Alley, Frederick County Fire Marshal's Office spokesman Mike Dmuchowski said.

Dmuchowski said about 35 firefighters from six companies were on the scene, but they were unable to put out the fire until power was cut to the area, which didn't happen until about 2:45 p.m.

The fire was extinguished almost immediately once FirstEnergy crews had cut the supply. Dmuchowski said no other structures were affected by the fire, but residences and restaurants in the immediate area were evacuated as a precaution.

A transformer malfunctioned, according to FirstEnergy spokesman Todd Meyers. The fire was on a platform about 20 feet in the air connected by two poles about 10 feet apart, he said.

Sheriff Chuck Jenkins said he called 911 to report the fire. He said he was parking in a lot behind the transformer when he saw two people looking up toward the area.

"I asked them what they were looking at and they pointed up there," Jenkins said. "And then I saw it erupt into flames."

Traffic was slowed considerably as stoplights were out and Frederick police directed drivers around the first block of North Market Street, which was blocked by fire and rescue equipment. East Patrick Street was closed from Market Street to Carroll Street.

About 25 customers in the immediate area were without power while the transformer was being repaired, Meyers said.

Crews expect to use a crane to lift equipment off the platform.

"When they make repairs, it's going to turn off power," Meyers said.

He didn't know how many customers would be affected, but the utility company's website reported a peak of more than 1,100 customers without power at about 3:15 p.m.

Most were restored by 4 p.m., according to its website.

Those who live near the fire are going to be without electricity longer than that, Meyers said, but he did not know how long that would be.

As of 6 p.m., about 25 customers near the transformer were still without power, according to Doug Colafella,-- Potomac Edison Co. spokesman.--They are expected to be without electricity until equipment is replaced.

Colafella could not predict how long that would be.

-- Pam Rigaux contributed to this story



Photo by Bill Green

A transformer station burns Monday as firefighters are on the scene of the fire behind buildings in the first block of North Market and East Patrick streets.

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