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## City of Centralia

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For Immediate Release

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Jury decides that the City of Centralia was not negligent in house fire.

Centralia, Missouri – On March 1, 2016, a Boone County jury found in favor of the city of Centralia, MO, on the plaintiffs' claim of negligence. Centralia operates a municipal utility, providing electric service to its residents. In August of 2012, there was a short in a residential electric service line owned and operated by the city, causing the live wire to fall to the ground and ignite the dry grass. The Centralia volunteer fire department extinguished the fire. No one was injured, but there was extensive damage to the residence. The home owners sued the city for negligence, alleging the city failed to properly inspect and maintain the service line. After hearing the evidence and arguments of the home owners and the city, the jury conducted its deliberations and found in favor of the city, awarding no damages to the plaintiffs.

The City was represented in this case by Diana Carter who is an attorney in the firm of Brydon, Swearingen and England and was hired by the City's insurer Missouri Public Entity Risk Management Fund (MOPERM).

City Administrator Matt Harline said, "While this was a victory for the City because the jury decided that the City did their job and was not negligent, the result is that plaintiffs in the case, three sisters, that are former Centralia residents, are left with a house and personal property destroyed by fire. The City takes absolutely no joy in their profound loss caused by unforeseeable circumstances." Harline notes that the City offers some help in the form of an agreement to qualified property owners to reimburse \$1,500 for demolition expenses or \$3,000 for demolition and rebuilding expense. This would be available to the property owners.

Harline added, "The City of Centralia is fortunate have such a dedicated electric department. They meet and usually exceed national safety standards as was proven in court." Harline noted that in each of the last two citizen surveys the Electric Department received a favorable rating from over 93% of respondents. Harline concluded by saying, "This ruling helps by keeping the standard of care reasonable and that keeps our rates competitive while keeping management, jobs and any revenues earned over expenses in the community."