Avoid Contact with Overhead Power Lines (Handout)

What’s at Stake

Every year, there are thousands of injuries and hundreds of work-related electrocutions involving either contact with electric current or contact with overhead power lines.

What’s the Danger

Overhead electrical power lines have caused countless deaths at work when people have accidentally contacted them with ladders, scaffolds, poles, pipes, vehicles and vehicle loads. Some of these incidents were ordinary currents, but many involved high-voltage lines.

Example

A 37-year-old Internet cable installer died when he came in contact with a 12,000-volt power line that was hidden in a tree. The victim was in a cherry picker when he brushed against the power lines and caught fire. His co-workers quickly lowered the bucket and firefighters extinguished the flames, but the victim died a short time later.

How to Protect Yourself

Anyone who works near overhead power lines must be trained in safe procedures and methods to help them recognize the hazard and know how to avoid coming near or in contact with these lines.

Here are some safety procedures to keep in mind:

1. Identify the location, height and voltage of all overhead power lines on your jobsite.
2. Determine what activities will be taking place around the wires and where the dangers might be.
3. Maintain a minimum distance of 10 feet (3.5 meters) from all power lines. Do not erect scaffolding or operate machinery close to power lines.
4. Never use a stick or tape measure to determine distances to power lines. Estimate your distance instead. When in doubt, add more space.
5. If safe clearances cannot be maintained, contact the utility company to have the lines de-energized, guarded or temporarily re-routed.
6. Be particularly careful when operating heavy equipment around power lines. If a tree contacts a line and that tree also contacts machinery, the operator risks electrocution. Cement pumpers and cranes may also touch lines, putting the operator at risk. Prevent contact. Know the precise height of your load.
7. Station a signal person at a safe distance to direct the operator of a crane or another piece of heavy equipment and warn him if he is straying too close to the line.
8. Always check for overhead electrical hazards when moving scaffolds, high loads and other objects that extend high into the air.
9. Don’t forget indoor electrical installations. Touching a light fixture with a metal ladder can be fatal.
10. If you come across a fallen or sagging wire, assume it is live and do not go near it. Contact the utility company immediately.

11. Be particularly careful after a winter storm, which can bring down power lines. You might find yourself closer to a power line than you expected because you can’t see it buried under snow.

12. Know what to do and what not to do if equipment or a person touches a line. Don’t rush in to save someone who may still be in contact with a high voltage electrical current, or you could become a victim yourself. The power source must be disconnected first. Call the utility company and emergency personnel. Warn others away from the area and isolate the hazard if possible.

Final Word

*Overhead power lines are a danger off the job as well. When doing roof or yard work at home, follow the same precautions you would on the job and keep a safe distance from power lines.*

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Be careful working overhead Or you'll wind up in a hospital bed.