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Overhead powerline contact fatality

18 February 2022

A 45-year-old worker suffered a fatal electric shock when the spray boom tip of the tractor they were operating came into contact with overhead powerlines on a plantation farm. The shock occurred when the worker stepped down from the vehicle.



Spray tractor involved in the incident

Safety information

Contact between mobile plant and energised overhead powerlines is one of the biggest workplace killers.

To avoid these incidents

- move work away from overhead powerlines wherever possible
- if it's a short-term task, arrange with the electricity supply authority to have the power isolated

The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing and the findings are not yet confirmed. SafeWork NSW has commenced an investigation in response to the incident to determine its cause and circumstances. No conclusions should be drawn from the information in this publication about the cause of the incident or the culpability of any party.

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- for long term jobs, consult the electricity supply authority. They will assess the site and advise of appropriate controls that you should adhere to

If you can't avoid working near overhead power lines, you need to properly assess and control the risks.

Establish safe approach distances:

- if the risk is not eliminated, separate the electrical hazard from the mobile plant and the workers by ensuring the following approach distances are maintained:
 - Up to and including 132,000 volts – 3 metres
 - Above 132,000 volts and up to and including 330,000 volts – 6 metres
 - Above 330,000 volts – 8 metres

Note: when applying the above approach distances, it is important to take into account the 'sag and swing' of the powerlines, the movement of the mobile plant and the strength of the wind, as well as possible operator error or equipment malfunction.

- ensure a trained safety observer is used whenever mobile plant is in motion to communicate with the operator about the inadvertently movement closer than the above approach distances.

Create effective communication systems:

- ensure an effective communication system is in place for the workers performing the work.

If your vehicle contacts an overhead or underground powerline

- try not to panic, remain calm and stay in the vehicle until the power has been isolated and the powerlines are removed - don't risk being electrocuted by attempting to leave the vehicle
- advise anyone near the incident site to stay a minimum of eight metres from the vehicle, and from anything else that is in contact with the powerlines
- contact Essential Energy immediately on 13 20 80 to switch off the power and call triple zero (000) to report the life-threatening situation.

Evacuating from the vehicle:

An emergency evacuation is extremely dangerous and should only be attempted as a last resort, such as if the vehicle is on fire. Remember, never approach the vehicle and always treat wires as live. When evacuating it is critical that you:

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- jump well clear of the vehicle and the immediate ground below
- land with your feet together - do not touch the vehicle, fall forward or backward, or allow your feet to step apart
- jump or shuffle with your feet together until you are at least eight metres clear of the vehicle, powerlines or anything else in contact with them
- do not return to the vehicle for any reason.

It is recommended that operators of high machinery practice this jump/shuffle technique on a regular basis.

Farmer rebate to prevent powerline accidents

Small businesses in NSW will now be able to claim a rebate from SafeWork NSW to purchase overhead powerline markers to help prevent dangerous incidents on NSW farms. Overhead powerline markers are highly visible, reflective devices installed by an energy provider along overhead powerlines to show where wires are located. After completing an eligible workshop, webinar, virtual farm safety experience or advisory visit from SafeWork NSW, eligible landholders can apply for a \$1,000 small business rebate towards the cost of the markers. Essential Energy has committed to offering free labour to install up to 10 markers on each property.



Remember the safe work procedure when working near overhead power lines - **LOOK UP AND LIVE.**

More information

- [Work near overhead powerlines](#) - Code of Practice
- [Farmer rebate to prevent powerline accidents](#)
- [Emergency response to a powerline incident](#) – Essential Energy
- [Operating cranes & mobile plant near overhead electric lines](#) -Safe Work Australia
- [Mobile plant operating near overhead power lines safety alert](#) – SafeWork NSW
- [Look up and live](#) - Powerline & safety tool planning app

Electricity network operators

- [Ausgrid](#) - 13 13 65
- [Endeavour Energy](#) - 13 37 18
- [Essential Energy](#) - 13 23 91
- [Transgrid](#) - 1800 222 537
- [Sydney Trains](#) - 131 500

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