Spot The Safety Violation: Ladders & Power Lines Are a Bad Combination



Should this ladder be anywhere near overhead power lines'much less leaning against them'

Overhead power lines pose a serious safety hazard to individuals working near them, especially if the workers are using equipment such as scaffolding or ladders. The danger is that the equipment will inadvertently come into contact with or brush against an energized power line, shocking or electrocuting a worker.

This picture was one of the entries in the Ladder Exchange 2015 Idiots on Ladders Competition held by the UK-based Ladder Association. What's shocking'pun intended'is that this photo didn't win the contest.

The goal should be to avoid *any* contact with overhead power lines. So actually leaning a ladder against power lines is not only dangerous but also, well, idiotic.

Just look what can happen when workers use ladders around overhead power lines:

- In Qu□bec, a young roofer was killed when the aluminum ladder he moved touched an overhead power line. The CSST

found fault in the planning of the work around power lines and ordered the employer to develop safe work practices for such work.

- In New Brunswick, a 22-year-old roofer and a co-worker finished installing shingles on a roof and were taking down an aluminum ladder. While his co-worker was holding the base down with his feet, the roofer stood under the ladder and pushed the top out so it was vertical. He then turned the ladder 90 degrees and began walking backwards to lower it to the ground. He contacted a 7,200-volt overhead electrical line and was electrocuted, dying immediately.

Take 5 Steps to Protect Workers Around Power Lines

To protect your workers from such tragedies, comply with the requirements for work near power lines in your jurisdiction's OHS laws and take these steps to protect them and your equipment:

Step #1: Contact the operator of the overhead power line near your job to find out the line's voltage and notify it that you'll be working in the area.

Step #2: Determine the minimum safe distance from the line at which workers may work, which can range from 3 to 6 metres.

Step #3: If workers can maintain that distance while working, implement appropriate safety measures, such as the use of warning signs and signalers, and bans on the use of metal ladders scaffolds and mobile equipment.

Step #4: If workers *can't* maintain the minimum safe distance from the power lines, have the line operator de-energize or relocate the line, get assurances that the line is adequately insulated or guarded, or implement alternative safety measures.

Step #5: Properly train and supervise workers who must work

around overhead power lines.

And to keep workers safe when they use extension and step ladders on the job, ensure that you comply with the requirements for portable ladders in the OHS laws. And train workers on ladder safety to ensure that they understand:

- Step and extension ladders aren't interchangeable
- How to inspect ladders to ensure that they're not damaged, broken or otherwise unsafe.