

Spot The Safety Violation: Scaffolds & Power Lines Don't Mix



Workers were moving this scaffold when it contacted the energized power lines. Can you guess what happened to them?



When workers are using any equipment—whether it's scaffolding, ladders or mobile equipment such as cranes—they must ensure that no part of the equipment contacts an energized overhead power line. If it does, the consequences can be fatal.

This picture shows the aftermath of a tragedy in Texas. Three workers were constructing a building when they moved the metal scaffold. It came into contact with energized overhead power lines, shocking all three workers. They died from their injuries.

A similar incident happened in Québec.

Example: Four workers were moving scaffolding when it came into contact with overhead power lines. Two workers were electrocuted and a third was injured. The CSST concluded that the height of the scaffolding and the path chosen to move it allowed it to contact the power line. The company also lacked safe work procedures for this kind of work [DML, LP, Govt. News Release, Feb. 19, 2009].

In addition, equipment that touches an energized power line can often be damaged and even destroyed.

Example: A boom truck in New Brunswick made contact with a 7,200-volt distribution line. No one was hurt. But the current flowed to the ground through the truck, which caught fire and was completely destroyed—costing the company the loss of equipment worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Take 5 Steps to Protect Workers Around Power Lines

If your workers work anywhere near overhead power lines, comply with the requirements for such work 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. (At Safety Smart, you can download a safety talk on respecting power lines.)