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Contact with Energized Overhead Power Lines

In the past month, there have been two fatalities involving contact with energized overhead power lines. One incident claimed the life of a young male while seriously injuring another. This incident occurred when the two victims were lowering the long metal support pole of a party tent and it contacted the overhead power line. Three weeks later, four scout leaders were killed doing exactly the same thing, lowering a tent pole in a jamboree in the United States.

Unfortunately, such accidents are not uncommon to Ontario and The Electrical Safety Authority. Fatalities involving power lines account for 50% of all electrocutions in Ontario in the past 8 years.

Most victims were unaware that there was an overhead power line when they accidentally made contact with it.

One common thread in these incidents is the victim's lack of awareness of where the overhead energized power lines are. Power lines are everywhere and the public often treats power lines no differently than a fire hydrant. It has always been there and it is not seen as a threat or danger.

Contact with overhead power lines will likely result in serious injury or fatality

Accidental contact with an energized power line is not forgiving. History has shown that contacting a power line while moving a ladder, using a tree trimmer, erecting an antenna or flagpole, or other similar work usually results in a fatality or serious injury.

The Electrical Safety Authority (ESA) continues to warn the public to use caution when working near overhead power lines. Ladders, antennas, tree trimmer, flagpoles, rolling scaffolds, boom trucks have all contributed to electrical fatalities at home and workplace over the last decade.

Apply caution before starting work near any power line. The following steps should be followed;

1. Conduct a hazard assessment before starting work; determine the location of the power line.
2. If possible, relocate the work so that it is not near the power line. When this is not practical, a safe work procedure should be followed which includes;

- a) Determine the safe distance of approach (limit of approach). The limit of approach is not the same for all power lines. It depends on the voltage the line is carrying. The higher the voltage, the further the distance required. For example – the limit of approach for a 250,000 Volt line is 6 meters. For other voltages and corresponding limits of approach, call the local utility for assistance.
- b) Hire qualified persons to do jobs near overhead electrical lines, such as tree trimming or have the line de-energized by the local electrical utility or power supply authority.
- c) Mark the safe distance or limit of approach. If the work is on the ground, use cones or barriers. Using a person as a spotter will work as well. Make room for swing areas for tools, ladders and cranes. Keep far enough away so that if an object such as an antenna were to fall it would not be close enough to contact the power line.

Respect the power of electricity – ensure that you, your family and co-workers apply caution when working near electric power lines.