

fall 2010

news lines

Current news and views from
Alberta's Joint Utility Safety Team

WHERE'S THE LINE?

The farmer prepared to move the grain auger to the next row of granaries. Anxious to finish by lunch, he began to move the auger by hand, neglecting to lower it from the "up" position. Taking only a few steps, the auger hit the power line and power shot through his arm. What he thought would be a time-saving decision became a life-changing moment, forever.



THE SHOCKING TRUTH

Every day, three Albertans needlessly come into contact with an overhead or underground power line, risking serious injury or death because they didn't ask themselves, "WHERE'S THE LINE?"

NEW POWER LINE SAFETY CERTIFICATION TARGETS OIL AND GAS AND CONSTRUCTION

Alberta's struggle with workplace safety is a continual and growing concern. In 2009, there were 110 fatalities in addition to 26,000 on-the-job injuries, most of which could have been avoided with proper safety training and awareness. Power line incidents are no exception.

Every day, three Albertans needlessly risk their lives around power lines. And with the majority of incidents occurring in the oil and gas and construction industries – among construction and heavy equipment operators – JUST considers these industries to be top priority.

To help address this issue, a committee was formed in 2008 with representatives from JUST, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) and Enform (the safety association for the oil and gas industry) to create a power line safety training program for these industries. Two years of collaboration and pooling expertise has resulted in an intensive one-day Power Line Safety and Awareness Certification that will be taught by Enform instructors.

Through industry collaboration and a mutual goal to increase worker safety in Alberta, power

line safety training is now reaching supervisors, decision makers and operators working in the oil and gas and construction industries. Ultimately, this and other power line safety initiatives are about keeping Albertans safe on the job site.

To register or learn more about the Power Line Safety and Awareness Certification, visit www.enform.ca.

Stay "7 Metres Safe"

Keep yourself and your equipment at least seven metres away from overhead power lines. If you must work closer, call your local electric utility company first.

Before excavating, always call **Alberta One Call** (1-800-242-3447) to locate any underground power lines.

NEGATIVE TRENDS IN POWER LINE CONTACTS: THE TOP CAUSES

Concern is growing over the trend in increased numbers of power line contacts in Alberta among equipment operators and truck drivers with regards to five common pieces of commercial and farm equipment.

COMMERCIAL EQUIPMENT

#1 Cause – Track hoes

- Track hoe incidents are the most prevalent among contacts with power lines and account for about 25% of direct power line contacts in Alberta. These contacts (mostly overhead but in some cases underground) occur either while the equipment is operating or being transported. In 2009, one of those incidents resulted in two fatalities.

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Dead-End Shortcuts

I have yet to forget the smell of my burning shirt and flesh.

"I was careful, deliberate and I didn't touch the power line – I thought that would be enough, but it wasn't." Over 14,000 volts of electricity coursed through Allen Kurtz's body when a bolt of electricity arced from an overhead power line. The incident, which caused the third-generation farmer to lose both his legs, prompted Kurtz to share his personal tragedy with others in hopes of preventing similar accidents.

"Before my accident, I was always careful around electricity – but I didn't know power could jump. My accident was a wake-up call," says Kurtz. He remembers the day of his accident well. In planning to move a grain bin, he surveyed his worksite and took note of the nearby overhead power lines under which he would have to move the bin. He remembers thinking he should call the utility, but his impatient "kid-with-a-new-toy" attitude prevailed over logic. Kurtz thought he took the right precaution by measuring what he thought was a safe distance between the grain bin and the power line before starting to work. However, once on top of the

bin, a blinding flash of light sparked when the electricity jumped (otherwise known as arcing) from the line to his metal tape measure. "I have yet to forget the smell of my burning shirt and flesh."

Kurtz attributes many power line accidents to a lack of knowledge.

"People simply don't know the risks, just like I didn't." Kurtz has become an advocate for power line safety, sharing his powerful story in person and through a safety training video. By speaking to others, he is able to share the information that he wishes someone had told him. "It is my hope that my story might save other families the unnecessary grief that my family endured, maybe even save a few lives."



Safety Advocate Allen Kurtz

NEGATIVE TRENDS IN POWER LINE CONTACTS: THE TOP CAUSES

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- The main reason for these contacts is that operators don't realize that the size of equipment has grown while the height of power lines has remained the same. Similarly, when transporting track hoes, operators need to take into account the combined height of the trailer and the height of the track-hoe arm.

#2 Cause – Back hoes

- Underground contacts have remained consistently high over the past few years.
- Back hoes are the second most prevalent piece of commercial equipment making contact with power lines; they lead in the number of underground power line contacts. Unfortunately, it is not clear what is driving the issue: failure to get a proper line locate done or inexperience in working with marked utility lines.

#3 Cause – Gravel/dump trucks

- Gravel/dump trucks is the third-highest category of commercial equipment making contact with power lines, including driving with the box in the "up" position. This despite a general decrease in Alberta's construction activity in the last year.

FARM EQUIPMENT

#4 and #5 Causes – Air seeders and sprayers

- Many farmers have been working the same piece of land for generations, safely passing under power lines. Because farmers are so busy,

especially in spring and fall, they fail to account for the increase in the size of their tractor and implement while the height of power lines has remained the same over the years.

- In 2009, farm equipment power line contacts accounted for about 21% of all power line contacts. At least 10 contacts were a result of air seeders or sprayers, in the transport position, snagging a power line.
- There has already been at least two farm fatalities in Alberta in 2010 as a result of farmers moving equipment into energized power lines.

3 RULES TO A SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENT

Before you start any job, always remember:

1. **Make a work plan to include the location of overhead and underground power lines.**
2. **Know the height of your equipment.**
3. **Keep your equipment at least seven metres away from power lines.**

JUST's MANDATE

In 2006, Alberta's electric utilities and the Alberta Government formed the Joint Utility Safety Team (JUST) to collectively help address the common safety issue of contact with power lines.

JUST's mandate is to positively affect change in attitudes and behaviours toward power line safety, to help reduce power line incidents. Through ongoing safety awareness and industry education, JUST is committed to helping breed a long-term "culture of power line safety" in Alberta. This involves everyone working around overhead or underground power lines, including electric utilities, oil and gas, construction, forestry and agricultural industries.

For more information, contact Lyndsay Thorlacius, JUST Chair at 403-267-5919 or at lyndsay.thorlacius@altalink.ca

Learn more about staying safe at wherestheline.ca

The members of the Joint Utility Safety Team:

ALTALINK

ATCO Electric

ENMAX

EPCOR

FORTIS ALBERTA

Government of Alberta

WHERE'S THE LINE?
POWER LINE SAFETY