

NEWS RELEASE

May 25, 2011

Number of power line incidents in Alberta declines but severity increases

Alberta's Second Annual Power Line Safety Day

Calgary...Power line risks are 24/7/365. In 2010, there were approximately 820 power line incidents in Alberta compared to 843 in 2009. Despite an encouraging three per cent decline, there were still five tragic fatalities – a solemn reminder of the need for ongoing power line safety awareness and education. The fact is, every day three Albertans risk their lives needlessly around overhead or underground power lines.

With this in mind, the Joint Utility Safety Team (JUST), is hosting Alberta's Second Annual Power Line Safety Day on Wednesday, May 25, at Calgary's Fire Training Academy. Formed in 2006, the JUST partners – AltaLink, ATCO Electric, ENMAX, EPCOR, FortisAlberta and the Government of Alberta – are committed to positively affect change in attitudes and behaviours toward power line safety.

Operators of large equipment and truck drivers, typically males between the ages of 18 – 50, are at high risk for power line incidents due to productivity pressures and deadlines that can often lead to skipping safety steps. The problem is further exacerbated by complacency born of routine tasks and a false sense of invincibility.

The latest contributing factor is the fallout of the 2008 economic downturn which saw many Operators leave the province in addition to retirements and a decrease in power line safety training. "This trend has resulted in less experienced and fewer senior Operators on hand to share their power line safety knowledge and experience," according to Lyndsay Thorlacius, JUST Chair, "a concern that has led us to expand our efforts to engage employers who play a critical role in influencing safety behaviours among Operators."

In addition to its ongoing Operator-focused "WHERE'S THE LINE?" advertising campaign, JUST is now also looking to help employers with power line safety. "Through discussions with safety leaders in the oil and gas, construction and utilities industries, we've learned what tools they need to impart power line safety best practices." To that end, the revamped wherestheline.ca website – a central resource for employers – is being launched as part of JUST's Power Line Safety Day event. The site includes downloadable power line safety training materials, promotional items, as well as safety news, articles and videos. Employers can also sign up for the e-newsletter and updates.

The Power Line Safety Day event will feature speakers, displays, and live demonstrations, ranging from downed-power line and vehicle demonstrations to arc simulators.

Since 2007, the "WHERE'S THE LINE?" campaign has served as a reminder to Operators to always ask themselves the question and to know the answer before starting any work.

The “7 Metres Safe” message reached 40 per cent awareness among Operators in fall 2010, a 31 per cent increase since 2008.

Results to date have been very encouraging, but Thorlacius is quick to point out that “We need to continue to be vigilant about raising awareness of how these deadly incidents can be prevented. By working collectively, we’re achieving more impact than if each partner worked independently to educate the public about power line safety.”

The Power Line Safety Day event will start at 10:15am at the Fire Training Academy located at 5727 23 Avenue SE, Calgary.

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