

SA0002 – 08/10/2003

## Scaffolding and overhead power lines

### Purpose

To remind employers, employees and contractors about the potential for fatal electric shock from contact with energised (live) electrical overhead powerlines.

### Background

NT WorkSafe received notification of an incident in which workers lost control of a mobile scaffold while attempting to push it down a sloping driveway to a footpath. The scaffold struck overhead low voltage powerlines. The workers were fortunate not to have been electrocuted.

Physical contact with powerlines is not required to risk electrocution. Persons, plant, equipment or materials at a workplace must not enter the “danger zone” of an overhead power line.



*Photo used from archives showing scaffolding in contact with overhead powerlines*

### Issues of concern

Fatal accidents have occurred in the past where scaffolding has come into contact with overhead powerlines.

- This accident could have resulted in multiple fatalities.
- Failure to conduct a risk assessment on the site before dismantling or moving the scaffolding.
- Possibility of members of the public being put in danger.
- Businesses in the area were inconvenienced during the period of power shutdown and the powerlines required extensive repairs.

### Recommendations

- Persons intending to work in the vicinity of overhead power lines shall comply with the legal requirements.
- Do not start work near overhead power lines until a pre-start/job meeting and a written risk assessment have been completed on site, and all persons understand their roles regarding safety.
- Ensure that an employee or any plant or material used or controlled by an employee does not enter the danger zone of an overhead power line.
  - Danger zone is where scaffolding is used in the vicinity of low voltage power lines (less than 1000 volts) the clearance must not be less than 4.0m where any metal scaffolding is used. (Refer to NT WorkSafe bulletin WH 05.01.02).

- The risk assessment should address work using materials and equipment 2.5 metres or more in length, ie the erection and dismantling of scaffold.
- Contact Power and Water on freecall 1800 245 091 prior to carrying out any work in close proximity to overhead power lines.

### Legislative requirements

*Work Health Act*, section 29(1):

*“An employer shall, so far as is practicable –*

- (a) provide and maintain a working environment at a workplace that is safe and without risk to the health or safety of the workers working at the workplace; and*
- (b) ensure that the health and safety of any other person is not adversely affected as a result of the work in which the employer or any worker is engaged.”*

Penalties exist for breaches of *the Act*. **Penalty** In the case of a body corporate - \$125,000  
In the case of a natural person - \$25,000

### Further information

Additional information on this issue ([WH 05.01.02](#) Electrical safety – working close to overhead powerlines) or other safety matters is available from NT WorkSafe:

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