

Toolbox Talk Training: Basic Electrical Safety – Stay Aware of Overhead Power Lines

Many electrical injuries and fatalities happen even when workers are aware of hazards at ground level. The real danger is often overlooked—overhead electrical power lines. These lines are frequently uninsulated, and if a person or anything they are handling makes contact with them, electricity can travel through the person to the ground, resulting in serious injury or death.

Here are some common work activities where accidental contact with overhead power lines has led to electrocutions:

- Carrying a portable metal ladder in an upright position while moving it ● Rolling or moving metal scaffolding from one area to another.
- Operating a forklift with an elevated load that strikes or approaches a power line.
- Raising, extending, or moving boom lifts, bucket lifts, or scissor lifts near overhead lines.
- Using a crane and unintentionally swinging a suspended load into a power line.
- Working with long conductive tools, such as paint rollers on metal extension poles, near overhead lines.
- Handling conductive materials like metal roofing, siding panels, aluminum gutters, or flashing during construction or demolition work.
- Raising or operating dump trucks or similar equipment with elevated beds near overhead power lines.

These situations may seem obvious when discussed in a training setting, but in the field it is easy to lose awareness of hazards above us while focusing on the work in front or around us. Overhead power lines are often overlooked, yet they can be one of the most dangerous hazards on a job site.

Before starting any task, take a moment to look up and identify any overhead electrical lines in your work area and along your travel path. If there is any doubt about whether a line is energized, treat it as live and contact your supervisor or safety representative for guidance. Always maintain a minimum clearance of at least 10 feet from overhead power lines for yourself, your tools, and any equipment you are operating or moving. In some cases involving high-voltage lines, even greater clearance distances may be required to prevent electrical arcing.

Can anyone think of other tasks or situations where a worker could accidentally come into contact with an overhead power line? Thank you for attending today's toolbox talk. Please remember to sign the training certification form to receive credit for your participation.

