More information

Electrical Safety Office
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Ergon Energy
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Energex
ergex.com.au
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Dial Before You Dig
1100.com.au

Working safely as an arborist near powerlines

Working near powerlines can be fatal. Touching them or straying into the exclusion zone around them can result in a serious electric shock.
If you must work near powerlines, you should follow these three steps:

1. **Develop a safe system of work before you start**
   - Identify overhead and underground powerlines by consulting maps and/or talking to the property owner and electrical entity.
   - Conduct a site specific risk assessment – think about the type of plant and equipment/tools used, nature and size of loads being moved, site and weather conditions, type of work being done, and set-up and pack-up procedures.
   - Put risk controls in place – the most effective way of controlling the risk is to de-energise the line for the duration of work where there is a risk of contact.
   - Before work begins, ensure vegetation isn’t hiding powerlines from view.

2. **Keep your workers and contractors informed about electrical safety**
   - Induct and train your workers and contractors in safe work procedures, emergency procedures, and exclusion zones (*Figure 1*).
   - Carefully plan the tasks to be completed near powerlines and work away from them whenever possible, not underneath them.

3. **Avoid going into exclusion zones**
   - Make powerlines and poles visible. Ask your electrical entity for permission to paint power poles and/or have them install markers or flags on the powerlines.
   - Plan your work so tree branches do not fall across powerlines.
   - Where possible, use insulated or non-conductive tools and equipment.
   - Operators should use a safety observer when raising their elevated work platform (EWP), and always lower it before relocating it.
   - A safety observer should monitor both the arborist’s activity in the tree, as well as the ground crew, to ensure people and equipment stay out of exclusion zones.
   - Follow the safety advice you obtain from your electrical entity.

*Figure 1.*

*Figure 2.*

- Show your workers the safe distance from an exclusion zone by marking it on the ground.
- Ensure people are aware that powerlines sag or sway in hot or windy weather (*Figure 2*).
- Long hand-held poles/equipment or cutting tools and elevating work platforms have the potential to enter an exclusion zone. Ensure your operators know the height and reach of equipment to be used.