

Safety and health alert

11/95 Carpenter electrocuted

Incident

A carpenter was electrocuted at a residential building site when a damaged electrical lead allowed current to run from a portable generator through him to his panel van.

Factors

The generator was mounted in the rear of the panel van on home-made aluminium angle runners, mounted on a wooden base and screwed to the metal floor of the vehicle.

A flexible single-insulated figure-8 lead which connected the generator to an electric drill battery charger was caught between the generator frame and the runner. The vibration of the operating generator wore through the lead's insulation, exposing bare wires.

The carpenter completed an electrical circuit when he placed his hand on the generator frame while his leg was touching the tail gate of the vehicle, allowing live current to run through his body from the generator to the vehicle.

Recommendations

1. Continuous observation and maintenance of all electrical leads is essential.
2. Owners of electrical equipment are strongly encouraged to use only double sheathed electrical cords on construction sites.
3. Considerable care is required when using flexible electrical cables around sharp objects.
4. Running any portable petrol-driven motor or generator in a confined area such as an enclosed utility or panel van is an extremely hazardous practice. Carbon monoxide gas can build up, or there may be a risk of fire from spilt fuel or other combustible material.
5. The provision of temporary power to building sites overcomes a number of problems associated with the use of portable generators. Builders are encouraged to consider this option.

Further Information

Further information can be obtained from the WorkSafe internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au, or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email: safety@docep.wa.gov.au.

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