

08/96 Handyman electrocuted trimming tree

Safety and health alert

Incident

A 40 year old part-time handyman was electrocuted trimming a tree near high voltage power lines in Swan View in December 1995.

Using a metal step ladder, the handyman climbed the tree to trim branches and had partially cut through a large branch. He attempted to push the branch away from the 22,000 volt power lines but it fell across them, electrocuting the handyman. He fell 6 metres to the ground.

Factors

1. The handyman used an inappropriate two metre domestic step ladder. He had to climb the rest of the way up the tree to reach the branch.
2. He did not use climbing ropes or a safety harness.
3. The branch was close to a high voltage power line.
4. The handyman was not suitably trained and worked alone near power lines.

Recommendations

1. Home owners and employers must ensure that contractors have the competency and equipment to carry out tree felling, lopping and pruning safely. Any person who employs another for such work becomes the principle contractor under section 19.4 of the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984, and must ensure that they are not exposed to hazards in the workplace.
2. All trees near power lines should be pruned according to Western Power guidelines by tree contractors who have completed the approved Tree Guild course, "Safe Working Around Power Lines."
3. WorkSafe Western Australia provides Guidelines for persons working close to power lines. These Guidelines are available by telephoning WorkSafe Western Australia on 327.8777, Western Power on 411.7867 or the Office of Energy on 422.5200.
4. Persons cutting trees near power lines must:
 - keep a safe distance from the power lines (follow the abovementioned Guidelines)
 - never work above power lines or cut branches that can swing down or fall on to live power lines
 - use an elevating work platform or non-conductive ladder of appropriate height (made of wood or fibreglass)
 - use safety harness and climbing rope when working at heights.



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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