



# SAFETY NEWS

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## A Changing Workforce

Courtesy of Ryan Chudecke

Electrical power-line installers and repairers regularly appear on the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistic's list of the top ten most dangerous jobs. According to Fallen Lineman Organization, an average of 45 lineman a year lose their lives on the job in the U.S. alone. This is despite a workforce that is predominately made up of seasoned professionals. In the near future there is going to be a big shift in demographics due to many of the seasoned lineman nearing retirement age. It is estimated that nearly

50% of utility workers will be eligible to retire in the next 5 to 7 years. That is a lot of expertise, knowledge, and skill walking out the door.

Line workers tend to fall into one of three categories.

- **Beginners:** The job of a lineman is varied and complex. It takes 5 years to train a lineman to a journeyman level, and most in the industry acknowledge that it takes ten years to become a well-rounded lineman. The attitudes toward safety and correct procedural habits are instilled during this period of a lineman's career.
- **Survivors:** These linemen have seen the dangers first hand. They are aware of the common traps and pitfalls that lineman may encounter on any given day. The attitudes toward safety and procedural adherence are for the most part set in stone. They are far less likely to take unnecessary risks and are not easily rattled by stress, high workload, and time sensitive projects. These linemen know that shortcuts don't pay off. Often times these linemen are in leadership positions.
- **Cowboys:** These linemen take shortcuts to get the work done faster. They tune out safety talks because they think they will be fine. They have a can do anything attitude. Often, cowboys have good performance records in regards to getting a lot of work done in a short amount of time, which can land them in foreman positions. They can be difficult to talk to about safety issues, getting responses like "hurry up and get the job done" or "we don't have time for that."

Regardless of what category you may fall into people are fallible and even the best make mistakes. Mike Boyd, founder of Fallen Lineman Organization said “*Often routine tasks pose the biggest threat to line workers.*” When on storm work linemen remain on high alert regarding their safety and health. But on an average day, during a typical assignment, it might be easier to overlook a critical safety detail.

Time and again, accidents are caused by the same lack of understanding, the same dismissal or risk, and the fear that one might look inexperienced if they report a non-existent threat. In truth, an inexperienced team member might not see the threat before it's too late. A strong safety culture is crucial to any team of linemen. Not only should they be aware of likely risks and problems, but the lines of communication should be open at all times. When the idea is planted that workers have the power to protect themselves and their colleagues, safety concerns become something to be dealt with openly. With this freedom to speak up comes a reduced rate of risk, injury and death.

### **Top Ten Human Error Traps**

- 1. Stress**
- 2. High work load**
- 3. Time pressure**
- 4. Poor communication**
- 5. Vague or poor work guidance**
- 6. Overconfidence in work or ability**
- 7. First time performing a task**
- 8. Distractions**
- 9. First working day following time off**
- 10. Thirty minutes after a meal or waking up**

### **Climbing Poles**



Precautions must be taken before climbing wood poles. All poles should be visually inspected before climbing. An unusual angle or buckling at the ground line may show that the pole is rotted or broken. Horizontal cracks across the grain of a wood pole may weaken the pole. Vertical cracks rarely weaken a pole, but should be avoided when inserting gaffs into the wood. Several knots at one location may signify a weak point in a pole. Woodpecker holes or burn spots may indicate that the pole has been weakened.

It is essential to use a hammer to check the soundness of the pole before starting to climb. Pounding the pole with a hammer may show that the pole is shell-rotted or hollow. The surface of the wood pole should not be penetrated by the hammer blows. A shell-rotted or decayed outside layer of the wood pole may cause gaffs to cut out during climbing.

Poles should be set to the proper depth, and the soil must be in condition to support the pole before it is climbed. Soft, wet, or loose soil may permit the pole to shift position, especially if the strain is changed when the lineman is climbing.

The lineman should secure the pole before climbing, if inspection reveals a weakened pole, conductors are to be removed, or the strain is changed on a pole. A pole may be lashed to a new pole when it will be replaced. The lineman should use a bucket to do the work on a pole if the pole is shell-rotted, decayed or inspection indicates.