



# AVOIDING CONTACT WITH POWER LINES TOOLBOX TALK

## WHAT IS THE RISK?

If a MEWP (Mobile Elevating Work Platform) or platform occupant contacts energised power lines it can cause, electrocution, electric shock, fire, or an explosion. The same effects can occur without contacting a power line by arcing or flashover of electrical energy to a conductor.

## IPAF ACCIDENT DATA

MEWP accident data informs us that electrocutions and electric shocks are a common cause of death and serious injury. Working in the vicinity of power lines is a high-risk activity and must be planned and carried out safely.

## ELECTROCUTIONS CAN OCCUR AS A RESULT OF:

- Lack of planning and failure to identify power lines in your work area.
- The MEWP or its occupants inadvertently contacting power lines or entering an exclusion zone. An exclusion zone is the prescribed safety envelope area around live electrical power lines. Exclusion zone distances are specified by the Energy Supply Authority (ESA).
- Incorrect identification of power lines that are mistaken for telecommunication lines.
- Power lines that are hidden by vegetation or trees.
- Lack of awareness of the proximity of power lines.
- Complacency of the supervisor and MEWP operator assuming nothing will go wrong.
- Inadvertently operating the MEWP controls in the wrong direction or using the controls erratically.

## HOW CAN ELECTROCUTIONS BE PREVENTED?

- At the planning stage, the ESA should be contacted to inform them of your work location and what you intend to do. Work must not proceed until you have their authorisation.
- Ensure there is a site risk assessment, and a specific rescue plan in place and that the task is appropriately supervised. The risk assessment and the safe work procedures must be communicated and understood by everyone involved in the task.
- Ensure everyone is competent, anyone involved in the safe use of a MEWP must be trained and have received a machine specific familiarisation.

## WHO NEEDS TO KNOW?

This Toolbox Talk applies to all individuals involved with a MEWP planning to work near overhead power lines, including:

- Managers, Supervisors, and operators.
- Users of MEWPs.
- Nominated ground rescue persons.
- Spotters.

- Check for warning signage attached to the pylon/pole.
- Treat all overhead lines and other electrical apparatus as live unless declared “isolated” and “safe” by the ESA.
- Use a spotter (also known as marshal or banksman) to supervise the movement of the MEWP.
- Always remain vigilant for the presence of power lines.

## EMERGENCY MEASURES TO TAKE IF A MEWP OR PERSON CONTACTS A POWER LINE.

- Contact the emergency services and state: “This is an electrical emergency.” Take no action until the ESA confirms conditions are safe.
- Occupants must remain calm and stay in the platform. If possible, break contact with the power line before reversing the last movement.
- The nominated ground rescue person must not touch any part of the MEWP as it could be live.
- The nominated ground rescue person must warn all others to **KEEP AWAY FROM THE MEWP**. Cordon off the area if possible.

**STAY** in the platform, do not touch the base of the MEWP.

**CALL** the emergency services.

**WAIT** for help to arrive.



## USEFUL REFERENCES

- ISO 18893 MEWP Safety Principles, Inspection, Maintenance and Operation
- IPAF Operators Safety Guide (available on the ePAL app [www.ipaf.org/ePAL](http://www.ipaf.org/ePAL))
- Andy Access 'Keep clear of overhead cables' poster (available at [www.ipaf.org/andyaccess](http://www.ipaf.org/andyaccess))
- IPAF 'The Safe Use of MEWPs in the Vicinity of Power Lines' guidance (available at [www.ipaf.org/resources](http://www.ipaf.org/resources))
- IPAF 'High Voltage!' Safety Campaign (available at [www.ipaf.org/safe](http://www.ipaf.org/safe))