

Cut branch falls onto HV conductors

Vegetation management work - Issued April 2021

Safety alert

Background

Earlier this year vegetation management workers were pruning private trees on behalf of a distribution business. The work was being performed from an Elevated Work Platform (EWP) and a Safety Observer was being used for this work.

The EWP Operator was pruning a tree beside the uninsulated high voltage (HV) conductors, they step cut a branch and intended to snap it off. Before the EWP Operator was able to snap the branch it broke and fell uncontrolled onto the HV conductors.

This created an unsafe electrical situation that had the potential to cause property damage, serious personal injury or in the worst circumstance an electrocution.

Fortunately, no one was injured.

Investigation findings

ESV conducted an investigation into this incident and found the vegetation management workers:

- Failed to identify the potential hazard of the cutting technique used while working beside the HV conductors
- Failed to determine control measures to manage the risks created by falling vegetation while clearing trees beside the HV conductors
- Did not implement precautionary actions to control all hazards to ensure that the work was performed safely.



Key lessons

- Always maintain appropriate SADs when undertaking works in the vicinity of live electrical apparatus
- Regularly reassess each worksite for hazards when completing electric line clearance work
- Ensure all site hazards are identified and actions to control the hazards are implemented
- Ensure Safety Observers are positioned at suitable locations to effectively observe the work being performed.

Important information

- Failing to identify hazards at the work site will place workers at risk of serious personal injury or in the worst circumstance, electrocution
- Ensure each individual work site is assessed for hazards and controls are implemented to manage risks
- Working near live high and low voltage electric lines is dangerous. A vegetation management worker was electrocuted in February 2019 when they made contact with uninsulated low voltage electric lines.

Who we are

We are Victoria's safety regulator for electricity, gas and pipelines.

Our role is to ensure Victorian gas and electricity industries are safe and meet community expectations. We are also responsible for licensing and registering electricians, and educating the community about energy safety.

More information is available on the Energy Safe Victoria website: www.esv.vic.gov.au