

# Cut branch falls onto HV conductors

## Vegetation Management Work

Issued September 2021

### Safety alert

### Background

Earlier this year vegetation management workers were removing trees on behalf of a private construction company. The trees were being removed to allow for construction of a new dwelling. There was an overhead electric line present adjacent the tree removal site.

The ground crew worker was removing a branch from a tree adjacent the uninsulated high voltage (HV) conductors; the cut branch fell in an uncontrolled manner onto the HV conductors.

The fallen branch caused the operation of the electricity network protection.

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 but electricity supply was disrupted to nearby properties.



### Investigation Findings

ESV conducted an investigation of this incident and found:

- The vegetation management workers failed to maintain the minimum clearances for vegetation management work near protected aerial lines
- The crew failed to complete a site risk assessment prior to commencing the work
- The crew did not identify and outline control measures to ensure the work could be completed safely
- Cutting methods used did not allow for appropriate control of the tree that fell and contacted the HV conductors

ESV's view is that the combination of these failures means the crew members did not comply with the Electricity Safety (General) Regulations 2019, constituting a breach of Electricity Safety legislation; heavy penalties may be applied to such breaches.

## Key Lessons

- Ensure all site hazards are identified and actions to control the hazards are implemented
- Ensure personnel are qualified and suitably experienced for the task being undertaken
- Always maintain “No go Zone” when undertaking private works in the vicinity of live electrical apparatus
- Regularly reassess each worksite for hazards when completing electric line clearance work
- When planning vegetation management work ensure you assess that the work will remain outside minimum clearances to electric lines; engage with the distribution business if works are required within minimum clearances

## 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 work site is assessed for hazards and controls are implemented to manage risks and ensure compliance with electricity safety regulations
- Working near live high or low voltage electric lines are equally dangerous. A vegetation management worker was electrocuted in February 2019 when they made contact with uninsulated low voltage electric lines.

## Enforcement outcomes

Having completed its investigation of this incident it is ESV's view that the ground crew worker failed to maintain the minimum clearances from the electric line as required by the Electricity Safety (General) Regulations. Failing to maintain the minimum clearance is a breach of the regulations.

It is also ESV's view that the ground crew worker interfered with protected infrastructure, which is a breach of the Electricity Safety (General) Regulations.

ESV may choose to prosecute or take other enforcement action where it considers a breach of the Electricity Safety Act 1998 or Electricity Safety Regulations has occurred.

## Who we are

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

Our role is to ensure that 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](http://www.esv.vic.gov.au)