

Bendigo Tree Trimming Incident

Vegetation Management Work

Issued January 2022

Safety alert

Background

In October 2021 a Bendigo resident was taken to hospital and treated for burns after cutting through a low voltage (LV) service cable.

The resident was clearing a tree from a service cable when he made contact with the cable with the secateurs he was using. The contact between the secateurs and electric cable caused an arc flash which caused burn marks on the resident's hand and arm. They were taken to hospital to undergo tests for electric shock and get his burns treated.

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 the resident was not seriously injured but electricity supply was disrupted to nearby properties.



Investigation Findings

ESV conducted an investigation of this incident and found:

- The resident failed to maintain the minimum clearances for vegetation management work near protected aerial lines
- The vegetation was too close to the LV service cable prior to the incident
- The resident did not identify and outline control measures to ensure the work could be completed safely
- The responsibility for clearing the tree was that of the electricity distribution business as the tree was affecting the neighbours service cable.

ESV’s view is that the combination of these failures means the property owner 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

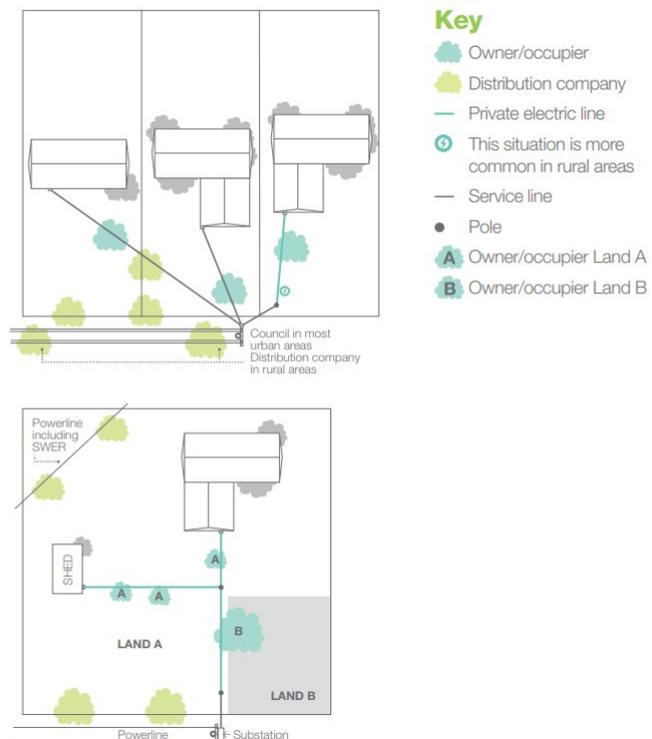
- Ensure all site hazards are identified and actions to control the hazards are implemented
- Ensure personnel are qualified and suitably experienced for the task being undertaken
- Always maintain “No go Zone” clearance distances when undertaking private works in the vicinity of live electrical apparatus
- 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 electricity distribution business if works are required within minimum clearances

Property owners or occupiers are responsible for keeping trees on their property away from their own service cable. Trees near other electric lines that cross your boundary or trees within your property near the electric lines in the street are the responsibility of the electricity distribution business (AusNet Services, CitiPower, Jemena, Powercor or United Energy) . See diagrams below.

For safety reasons it is recommended that trees be cut before they grow within 1m of an insulated electric service line. If the trees are closer than 1m or if cutting may cause any branches to fall onto electric lines, do not cut them yourself but contact a trained and experienced expert in vegetation management.

If you are concerned about trees on your property near any electric lines contact your electricity distribution company on the following numbers;

- AusNet Services – 13 17 99
- CitiPower – 13 12 80
- Jemena – 1300 131 871
- Powercor – 13 24 12
- United Energy – 1300 131 689



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 property owner 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 property owner 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