

Cut branch contacts LV electric line

Vegetation Management Work

17 May 2022



Safety alert

Background

A vegetation management worker was removing a tree on behalf of a property owner in a low bushfire risk area (LBRA). The work was being performed by a vegetation management worker operating an elevated work platform (EWP) similar to that pictured below, example pictured.



The vegetation management worker (EWP operator) was pruning branches from the tree with the intention of removing the whole tree. There was no safety observer on site. One of the pruned branches fell in an uncontrolled manner and made contact with an uninsulated low voltage (LV) conductor. The LV conductor clashed with a second LV conductor. This caused the conductors to spark and affected electricity supply.

The incident 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.

The incident was reported to the electricity distribution business and to Energy Safe Victoria (ESV).

Investigation Findings

ESV conducted an investigation of this incident and found:

- the EWP operator failed to maintain the vegetation Safe Approach Distance (SAD) to uninsulated LV conductors when they pruned the tree
- the EWP operator did not identify and outline control measures to ensure the work could be completed safely.

ESV's view is that the combination of these failures means the EWP operator 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
- Continually monitor site and environmental conditions and adjust work sequences and practices to adapt to changing conditions

- 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.

Important information

- Failing to identify hazards at a 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; this should be an ongoing process throughout the work task to adapt to changing conditions
- Working near live high and low voltage electric lines is 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 minimum clearances from the electric line, as required by the Electricity Safety (General) Regulations 2019, were not maintained. Failing to maintain the minimum clearance is a breach of the regulations.

- ESV's view is the EWP operator failed to ensure the tree being pruned maintained the required clearance from the electric line, which is a breach of Electricity Safety (General) Regulations
- ESV's view is the EWP operator 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. Heavy penalties may be applied.

Who we are

ESV is Victoria's independent safety regulator for electricity, gas and pipelines. Our role is to ensure Victorian gas and electricity industries are safe and meet community expectations.

A function of ESV is to investigate events or incidents that have implications for electricity safety, and to identify if the incidents have occurred due to breaches of electricity safety legislation.

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