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# Safe Products, Safe Workplaces for Utility Workers

By Steve Stephenson

Dramatic, deadly and unpredictable arc flash is just one of the many electrical hazards that hit power, telephone and cable TV workers. Electrocutation, burns, shocks, fires and falls are equally frightening, everyday occurrences.

Alertness, awareness and planning are important to keep people safe on the job. That's why Denise Frey, a consultant with Fiber Planners for electrical utilities, municipalities and plant systems, advises construction crews to have an emergency plan to address electrical accidents in the field. Who would direct a helicopter to a remote site? Where can the emergency medical technicians (EMT) crew bring an ambulance?

Signs, labels and tags communicate the dangers associated with emergency electrical work and complement protection products including barricade systems, fall protection, fire retardant clothing and personal climate systems for outdoor work in hot climates.

Durable labels and tags are also critical for electrical panel and equipment identification, circuit panels, cabinets, substations, condensing units and complex air handling units that need color coding.

For utility poles, use heavy-duty tags that don't require grommets and can be stapled in place or hung with plastic or metal ties. Use tags on utility poles to post important safety and identification messages with the issuer's name, date and pictograms. Tough, heavy-duty tags are especially useful for temporary labeling and for hanging where harsh and abrasive conditions are likely.

In Plaquemine, La., weather-resistant tags were used to identify each utility pole that was destroyed by Hurricane Gustav in 2008. In that event, more than 300 of the city's 3,200 power poles were wrecked.

Choosing the best printer for creating safety signs and labels takes careful consideration based on the volume of labels needed and necessary speed to produce the labels.

The battery-powered DuraLabel Toro 4-inch printer—which is compatible with a variety of

rugged, durable sign and label supplies and requires no network connection to operate—allows utility workers and administrators to print as many signs and labels as needed, when and where they're needed, indoors and outdoors.

While the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires labels to convey danger, warning and caution messages, label and sign material or supply choices are influenced by the type of surface the sign or label must adhere to, the climate or environment, whether the application is temporary or permanent, and the distance from which the sign or label will be viewed.



Other utility applications include labels and signs for:

- Wayfinding and providing directions,
- Identifying the location of underground cables,
- Marking hazardous or dangerous equipment,
- Vehicle identification,
- Marking transformers,
- Producing quality charts,
- Warehouse aisle identification, and
- Training aids.

OSHA compliance training is a key to workplace safety effectiveness.

Damon Beck, compliance manager for Silicon Valley Power, said: “We train our 14 power plant operators and eight administrative staff on all applicable California OSHA and Federal OSHA standards. These include heat stress, high voltage, fall protection, respiratory protection, personal protection equipment and lockout/tagout. In addition, we train our operators for confined space rescue.”

Test and measurement specialist Dave Skowronski with IDEAL Industries added: “A lockout/tagout program is a required safeguard system when testing in dangerous electrical environments. It prevents unexpected startup of machinery or the release of energy during testing activities. Locks and tags must be placed on electrical machinery, equipment or panels to indicate they are not to be operated until the lock or tag is removed.”

The safest workplaces are built with teamwork and cooperation at all levels. It's not enough to have one safety-obsessed guru in the midst of an untrained and uninspired workforce. Everyone has to be committed, willing to make suggestions and get involved in training, rehearsing and paying attention to the smallest safety-related details.



Electrical training programs must focus on:

- Correctly identifying electrical hazards;
- The responsibilities of both qualified and unqualified electrical workers;
- How to gauge safe distances when approaching exposed electrical conductors;
- Safety in wet locations containing electricity;
- Establishing compliance with OSHA and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 70E;
- Arc flash approach guidelines;
- Safely working with electrolytic cells, batteries and battery rooms, and lasers; and
- Labeling best practices— where labels should be placed, how to remove old labels and label maintenance.

While no one expects to be personally involved in an electrical accident on the job, utility workers need to plan as though they expect it to happen. By recognizing these events are real and severely impact the victims, their families, their friends and their companies, technicians can realistically plan and do everything to prevent accidents from occurring.

A safe workplace benefits everyone. Employers and employees work together to ensure all workers are protected from injury. When all employees and managers work to follow safety protocols and complete appropriate documentation, the entire organization is able to participate in a culture of safety.

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*About the author: Steve Stephenson is managing director of Graphic Products. For more Toro printer and safety labeling applications information, please go online to <http://www.duralabel.com/>.*

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