

TOOLBOX TALK: WORKING NEAR OVERHEAD POWER LINES

This Is One Mistake You Don't Get Back From

Conversational Opening - Before we get into rules, I want to start with real life. Most of us have worked around power lines at some point — rooftops, lifts, ducting, long ladders, crane picks, sheet metal. It's common in roofing, HVAC, and electrical work. Let me ask this first — not to put anyone on the spot.

1. Open discussion (1–2 minutes):

- Has anyone here ever had a close call with a power line?
- Or known someone who was shocked or killed?
- What happened?

(Let them talk. Don't rush this.)

Here's the reason we're having this conversation:

- Power line incidents are rarely about bad workers
- They're usually about **normal people under pressure**, doing familiar work, one small mistake

And electricity does not give second chances.

2. The Reality of the Hazard – The Why: Let's get clear on what makes power lines so dangerous.

- You do **not** need to touch a wire to be killed
- Electricity can travel through:
 - Ladders
 - Lifts
 - Crane lines
 - Ducting
 - Long tools
 - Sheet metal

Most fatalities happen when **equipment contacts a line**, not hands. That's why the **minimum safe distance is 3 metres / 10 feet**. That distance applies to:

- Your body
- Your tools
- Your equipment
- Anything that can move or swing

Weather matters too:

- Wind can move lines and materials
- Rain and humidity increase conductivity
- Heat and fatigue increase mistakes

This is why overhead lines are treated as **critical hazards**.

2. How We Control the Risk – The Rules That Matter:

When we're working near overhead power lines: If we are **within 3 metres**, the **utility owner must be contacted**

- They must either **de-energize the line, guard it or move it**
- And they must give **written confirmation**

If that can't be done:

- We follow the utility's instructions
- A **dedicated safety watch** is assigned
- Their only job is to watch clearance and stop work if needed

Signs, flagging, and barriers are not decoration. They are there because memory fails and conditions change.

4. Guided Crew Questions – Build Understanding

Now let's slow down and talk this through together. **Ask a few — not all — depending on the crew:**

- Where on our current or recent jobs do power lines create the biggest risk?
- What equipment do we use that could accidentally get too close?
- What usually causes people to drift closer than they planned?
 - Rushing?
 - Wind?
 - Poor visibility?
 - Overconfidence?
- If something doesn't feel right near a power line, what should you do?
- If the safety watch says "STOP," what happens next?

(Guide answers. Reinforce correct ones.)

5. Emergency Reality – Short and Clear - If equipment contacts a power line:

- Do **not** touch it
- Operator stays put unless there's fire
- Everyone else stays clear
- Supervisor and utility are notified immediately

Near misses matter. They are warnings — not paperwork.

6. Foreman Close – Culture Message

Here's the bottom line. Power lines don't care:

- How experienced you are
- How busy we are
- How many times you've done the job

One mistake can cost a life. If something feels unsafe:

- Stop
- Speak up
- We reassess

That's not weakness. That's professionalism. Our goal is simple: **Everyone goes home. Every day.**

CLOSING — Leader says: Safety isn't about blame. It's about respect—for life, for each other, and for the work we do. When we do the job right, everyone benefits; fewer injuries, better jobs, steadier work, and pride in what we build.

Let's keep holding each other to a high standard—because everyone deserves to go home safe, and everyone deserves to work on a crew they're proud to be part of.

Remember to make sure all questions are answered and thank your crew for their time.