



TOOLBOX TALK

Overhead Power Lines: The Hazard You Forget to Look Up For

TOPIC NO.	DURATION	AUDIENCE
TBT 11	10 to 15 min	All Crew

OSHA REFERENCE 29 CFR 1910 Subpart S · 29 CFR 1926 Subpart K · Electrical Safety

PROJECT / JOBSITE	DATE	PRESENTED BY

01 THE HOOK

START HERE

Most electrocutions happen to guys who were paying attention. They were watching the trip hazards in front of them, the trench at their feet, the panel they were working on. What they weren't watching was the wire 18 feet over their head. Overhead power lines are usually uninsulated. The minute you, your ladder, your scaffold, or your boom touches one, the current finds the fastest path to ground, and that path is through you. The hazard isn't the line itself. The hazard is forgetting to look up.







02 WHY OVERHEAD LINES ARE DIFFERENT

The wires running between poles overhead are almost always **uninsulated**. The insulation you might see on a household cord doesn't exist up there. There's nothing between the conductor and the air. Touch one with anything conductive (metal, wet wood, a person), and the current flows through it to ground.

And here's the part that surprises people: with high-voltage lines, you don't even have to touch the wire. The current can **arc through the air** several feet to a conductive object close enough to bridge the gap. Get close enough, and the line reaches out for you.

03 EIGHT TASKS THAT GET PEOPLE KILLED

Every one of these is a routine task on a normal jobsite. Every one of these has put a worker in a body bag when an overhead line was nearby and nobody looked up:

 Carrying a metal extension ladder upright	 Rolling a metal scaffold to a new spot
 Lifting a load with a forklift, or driving with one elevated	 Operating a boom-lift, bucket-lift, or scissor-lift
 Swinging or raising a load on a crane	 Painting or working with any tool on a long metal pole

⚡ Handling metal roofing, siding, gutters, or flashing

⚡ Driving a dump truck or any vehicle with the bed raised

04 THE 10-FOOT RULE

MINIMUM CLEARANCE

10

FEET

THE 10-FOOT RULE

Maintain **at least 10 feet** of clearance between any overhead power line and yourself, the conductive material you're handling, or the equipment you're operating. For ultra-high voltage lines, the required distance is even greater. The current can arc through the air without you ever touching the wire.

⚠ IF YOU'RE NOT SURE, ASSUME IT'S HOT

If you can't tell whether a line is energized, treat it like it is. Don't touch it. Don't bring conductive materials within 10 feet of it. Stop work and check with your supervisor or safety rep before going any further. The wrong assumption here doesn't give you a second chance.

05 PRE-TASK LOOK-UP

Before any of the eight tasks above, run this 30-second look-up:

- Stop and look directly above your work area and the path you'll travel.
- Identify any overhead lines (poles, building feeds, temporary service).
- Estimate the height. If lines are within 10 feet of your reach, stop.
- If you're unsure if a line is energized, assume it is.
- If clearance is tight, alert the supervisor before starting the task.
- For ultra-high voltage lines, ask what additional clearance is required.

06 WHY IT MATTERS

[JOBSITE]

FOR THE CREW

Overhead power line contact is one of the leading causes of construction fatalities. Most of these incidents are 100% preventable with a 30-second look-up and respect for the 10-foot rule.

[INDIVIDUAL]

FOR YOU

Survivors of overhead line contact often live with severe burns, amputations, or permanent nerve damage. The ones who don't survive don't get a story. Look up. Every time.

[HOME]

FOR LIFE OFF-SITE

Cleaning gutters with a metal pole. Hauling a ladder around the side of the house. Tree work near the service drop. Same physics, same rule, same consequence. 10 feet at home, too.

07 TODAY'S DRILL

TODAY'S DRILL LOOK UP, THEN MOVE

Right now, before you leave this huddle, look up at the area you'll be working in today. Identify every overhead line within sight. For each one, picture the longest object you'll handle (ladder, pole, panel, lift) and ask: can I keep 10 feet of clearance everywhere I need to work? If the answer is no, talk to the supervisor before you touch a tool.

08 CREW DISCUSSION

Take 2 minutes. Pick one.

1. Has anyone here ever come close to an overhead line, either on this job or another? What made you notice it (or almost not notice it)?
2. Of the eight tasks listed, which one is happening on this site this week? What's the plan to keep 10 feet of clearance?
3. Who calls the utility company if we need a line de-energized or sleeved? Does everyone here know that process?

09 ATTENDANCE & SIGN-OFF

All attendees confirm they participated in this Toolbox Talk and understand the content covered.

NAME (PRINT)	SIGNATURE

SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE _____

Date: _____



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