

The Bucket Went Up Into The Lines

Two men, one bucket, one reach. Nobody called the utility.

10 MIN

NFPA 70E Art. 130 · OSHA overhead line approach distances

California FACE 16CA003

WHAT HAPPENED

2016 · California · Tree care / date palm orchard · 45- and 22-year-old trimmers

Two seasonal tree trimmers, neither certified, were pollinating date palms. They parked the aerial lift truck directly beneath high voltage lines running about 15 feet above the tops of the palms. Both men got in the bucket and raised it into the lines. One reached out to move a line. The arc electrocuted both men and set the bucket on fire; the second man fell to the ground. The employer had no written injury and illness prevention program, no daily hazard analysis was performed, and the utility was never told work would happen near its lines.

WHY IT HAPPENED

The lift was set up under energized conductors and raised into them. No approach distance was established and no one asked the utility to de-energize, cover, or guard the lines.

WHAT THE STANDARD REQUIRES

- Survey for overhead lines BEFORE the truck is positioned — that is where this was decided.
- Maintain the minimum approach distance. Ten feet is a floor for lines under 50 kV, not a target.
- Notify the utility so lines can be de-energized, grounded, or covered.
- Train workers in a language and at a literacy level they actually understand.

TALK ABOUT IT — DO NOT SKIP THIS PART

1. Point at every overhead line you can see from where we are standing. How high? How far?
2. Who on this crew has the authority to stop a setup under a line? Does everyone know that?
3. Have we ever called the utility on this job? What is the number?

WHAT WE WILL DO DIFFERENTLY HERE

ATTENDANCE

PRINT NAME	SIGNATURE	PRINT NAME	SIGNATURE