

Are you logging near powerlines?

Recent incidents in BC's forest industry, in which trees being felled have contacted energized transmission lines, have led to the creation of some new documents by BC Hydro. These new documents support discussions with forest companies/ harvesting contractors to ensure obligations to identify the hazardous areas associated with harvesting near powerlines are addressed. One of these documents, The Logging Near Powerlines Emergency Contact Form, focuses on strict compliance with current WorkSafeBC (WSBC) Regulations.

www.bcforestsafe.org/files/frm_BCHydroLoggingNearPowerlinesEmergencyContact.pdf.

The specific WorkSafeBC Regulations that address working near powerlines include:

- Section 19.30, **Preliminary inspection.**
- Section 19.31, **Work in a hazardous area.**
- Section 26.2, **Planning and conducting a forestry operation.**

Electrical hazards

Electricity seeks the path of least resistance to the ground. That path could include a tree, mobile equipment, tools, or the human body. If any of these makes contact with an energized powerline, or if a broken powerline falls to the ground or lands on a vehicle or fence, electricity will flow to the ground and spread out in irregular concentric circles, in what is known as a ripple effect. The ripple effect can affect the ground for some distance away from the direct path of the electrical current, thereby posing a risk to workers and others nearby.

Responsibility for health and safety

Health and safety in forestry workplaces is the responsibility of all parties that have an influence on how work is carried out. Owners and licensees need to provide the employer or prime contractor with information necessary for identification and elimination or control of workplace hazards, including the location of powerlines in close proximity to the worksite. Planning of the operation needs to address how hazards are to be controlled and managed before work starts, and needs to be documented. Supervisors also need to ensure that workers are aware of the hazard that powerlines pose, and of the means to control the hazard.

Worksite inspections

Before any harvesting activities occur near powerlines, a qualified person authorized by the power company must inspect the worksite and assess the area for hazards. Hazards include situations where any part of a tree to be pruned or felled is within the limits of approach or may

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fall within that distance (Limits of approach is defined in table 19 1A of the WorkSafeBC regulations)

A qualified person must also inspect the worksite immediately before the work starts to ensure that the initial assessment is still valid and that no additional hazards are identified.

Eliminating electrical hazards

Where possible as part of the initial planning process ensure that cut block boundaries are well away from the powerline corridor. If it is determined that a tree is within the limits of approach or may fall within that distance then a plan must be put in place to eliminate the electrical hazard in order to conduct harvesting in a safe manner. Part of the plan shall include consulting with the power company about de-energizing the lines. If that is not possible, consider eliminating the hazard in another way such as topping the trees or creating a buffer zone.

If the hazard cannot be eliminated then the plan must include obtaining assurance from the power authority that any reclose feature has been disabled. This assurance must be held on site by someone authorized by the utility. Proper procedures must also be in place to conduct the harvesting in a safe manner. These procedures must include the requirements for proper training of all workers as well as the appropriate equipment and supervision to carry out the work safely.

Resources:

BCFSC Working Near Powerlines: <https://www.bcforestsafe.org/node/2845>

WorkSafeBC Regulations: <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/law-policy/occupational-health-safety/searchable-ohs-regulation/ohs-regulation/part-19-electrical-safety#D4856017F4574C08A7B76F0C0FA44FF8> and <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/law-policy/occupational-health-safety/searchable-ohs-regulation/ohs-regulation/part-26-forestry-operations#SectionNumber:26.2>

For clarification regarding requirements and related information when logging near powerlines please contact:

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