

Electrocution Can Be a Serious Problem on U.S. Farms

This summer's tragic incident during a national scouting event in Virginia reminds us that electrocution incidents can happen any time in a seemingly safe and tranquil setting. Farms and ranches are no exception! The simple movement of a portable grain auger from one bin to another can have tragic results if the individuals involved are not extremely careful. Tractors with large cabs and antennas and oversized grain wagons can also result in preventable electrocution incidents.

Most farmsteads could use a very careful overhead electrical line visual inspection. Service lines may no longer meet the proper height codes because of age and/or damage to poles and pole guy wires. The sag may have increased over the years, while the height of the machinery being used today may be much higher.

Don't be fooled by those birds perching on the overhead lines, or the thought that insulation on the lines could protect you. Always assume that the lines have no insulation and that they may not be as high as they look. Never undertake the height measurement of the lines without the on-site help of utility company officials.

During normal farming operations, maintain at least a 10 ft. margin of safety from the lines. When in doubt, don't operate taller equipment, including tractors and combines with antennas, tractors with their front buckets raised, and large, fold-up cultivators under electrical service lines on your farmstead. Make sure that all family members and workers on your farm are aware of the electrocution dangers.

Where possible, install electrical safety warning signage to prevent equipment and personnel contact with power lines. This will be beneficial to your suppliers who may be making deliveries to your farm. Always keep in mind this message from Iowa State University Extension, "Electricity doesn't allow mistakes. And neither should you."

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