

# Media Release – SafeWork SA and ETSA Utilities

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Sunday 12 December 2010

## LOOK UP AND LIVE: HARVEST WARNING ON POWER LINES

**SafeWork SA and ETSA Utilities are urging South Australian farm workers to heed the dangers of overhead power lines as the harvest resumes in the wake of recent rain.**

SafeWork SA Acting Executive Director, Bryan Russell says the agency's latest warning to farm workers on harvest safety now has added importance given the extra pressure created by the unseasonal weather.

"Alongside the many hazards at ground level, power lines pose a serious safety threat at height, with the ever-present risk of electrocution if booms, grain augers, field bins, or tractor-mounted load-shifting equipment make contact.

"The pressure and fatigue brought on by round-the-clock harvesting can often adversely affect safety management, and the results can be tragic," Mr. Russell says.

ETSA Utilities' General Manager Customer Relations, Sue Filby says as well as the death of a South Australian farmer at Nangwarry in the South East last year, four people were electrocuted on farms in Victoria.

"One person near Balaklava and two on the West Coast have been injured due to contact with power lines while working on farms in the past 18 months or so.

"The distance you can safely work near power lines, depends on their voltage and the weather conditions," Ms. Filby says.

"Generally the higher the voltage, the greater the safe clearance distance required.

"Therefore it's essential to check the relative height of equipment and machinery and power lines before commencing a task."

SafeWork SA says other factors to consider when working near overhead lines include:

- power lines not being visible from all angles (e.g. due to glare from the sun)
- clearance distances being hard to judge from the ground, especially from the operator's viewpoint
- power lines or an elevated load swaying, reducing clearances to dangerous levels
- power lines sagging due to heat-induced expansion.

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“Workplace safety laws in South Australia place a clear duty of care on an employer to do all that is *reasonably practicable* to ensure the health and safety of employees and others by providing *safe systems of work*,” Mr. Russell says.

To that end, SafeWork SA recommends the following precautions:

- Always check for the presence of power lines.
- Always conduct a hazard identification and risk assessment prior to starting the job.
- Always maintain a safe working distance from the power lines such as those distances listed in Electricity Act/Regulations. A quick reference guide to the safe working distance is attached (or refer to the SafeWork SA website: [Guideline for OP.pdf](#)).
- Erect personal protection barriers to prevent people or equipment from coming too close where appropriate.
- When using tall machinery or equipment near power lines do not allow any person (other than the operator) to be in contact with any part of the equipment or load.
- Where the load needs to be guided a non-conducting tag line should be used.
- Use a ‘spotter’ to ensure that the boom or load never encroach into the “no go zone”

Both ETSA Utilities and SafeWork SA are urging South Australian farm workers to consider electrical and other safety risks as part of their daily planning and ensure that the current harvest is completed as safely as possible.

*For answers and advice on workplace health and safety and the relevant laws, call SafeWork SA’s telephone Help Centre on 1 300 365 255. To report serious accidents or incidents, in the workplace call 1 800 777 209*

*To confirm the recommended clearance distances before starting work near power lines, **contact ETSA Utilities on 13 12 61**. Information also is available at [www.etsautilities.com.au](http://www.etsautilities.com.au)*