

Safety Notice

Notice to all network stakeholders

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Powerco 11kV Conductor Brought Down by Helicopter

Incident

During an aerial agricultural operation at **Morikau Station, near Raetihi**, a helicopter conducting a scheduled flight struck overhead power lines while manoeuvring. The aircraft was fitted with a wire strike protection kit, which functioned as designed and cut through the conductors.

The pilot was able to maintain control and land the helicopter safely. There were **no injuries**, however, **damage occurred to the helicopter** and Powerco assets. Powerco was notified immediately and the event was externally reported to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

How did it happen?

Planning and task execution

- The pilot had completed a site briefing and was aware of the presence and location of power lines.
- While flying the second block, the pilot made a **decision to change the original flight plan mid-operation** to cover an area that had been missed.
- This change took the aircraft into the path of the overhead lines.

Human and organisational factors

The decision to deviate from the agreed plan occurred **while airborne**, increasing cognitive load and reducing the opportunity to reassess risks.

- Flight procedures require that changes to plans be made **on the ground**, unless responding to an emergency.
- Mapping systems (e.g. Tabula with Powerco GIS overlays) were either not fully utilised or not set up for this job, removing an additional defensive layer.

What controls minimised the consequences

- The helicopter's **wire strike kit operated as intended**, preventing a more serious outcome.
- Pilot skill and experience enabled a controlled landing following the strike.

Key Learnings & follow-up actions:

- **Do not change flight plans mid-operation** unless responding to an emergency. Any change should be paused, landed, and reassessed.
- **Planning systems and wire mapping tools** (e.g. Tabula, Powerco GIS overlays) must be set up and verified **before work begins**, particularly for unfamiliar sites.
- **High-risk tasks should not be combined with last-minute changes**—task stability is a critical safety control.
- Continue to treat **overhead power lines as a persistent, high-consequence hazard**, even in familiar environments.

Please distribute to all relevant staff

Any questions/feedback on this Alert, please contact: chris.clarke@powerco.co.nz