



Safety Advice 13-2012 (Dec)(NZ)

Multiple Wood Pole Failure Incident Advice

The following advice is shared as EEA Safety Advice 13-2012 courtesy of Unison Networks Limited. Investigations into this incident are still under way.

At 9.30am on 20 December 2012, 6 hardwood power poles (five 11kV and one LV) collapsed into the carriageway of Omaha Road Hastings, an arterial route into the Hastings CBD. Fortunately no one was injured as a result of this incident and there was no third party damage. Due to the seriousness of the incident Unison immediately launched a full investigation into the incident and is awaiting the report.

It appears that one pole collapsed triggering a domino effect and bringing down the other five poles due to the added weight and strain on the overhead lines.

Recent pole inspections and testing had indicated that all the poles along this stretch of road were fit for purpose. They all had Residual Life Expectancies of around 4 years. However in the week preceding this incident Unison had received reports of high loads on trucks becoming entangled in a service line crossing the road to the pole that was the suspected initiation point of the pole collapse. The line height had been checked and the conductor re-tensioned. This work had been carried out at a time when temperatures had been regularly reaching the high 30os. Coincidentally very high winds a week earlier had not brought the poles down.

Two other factors of potential significance were noted when the failed poles were examined:

- Dents and paint markings on the poles at a height of about 4.5 metres above ground; and
- Recent walkway changes to this stretch of Omaha Road had resulted in concrete being poured right up to the base of the poles.

The marks on the poles confirm reported sightings of trucks and transporters clipping the poles as they parked on the side of this road. The road is a busy thoroughfare linking the Napier-Hastings Expressway and an industrial suburb to the CBD. It is possible that one such incident has resulted in premature pole failure.

As a result of the collapse the wood poles have been replaced with concrete poles, pole testing procedures have come under rigorous scrutiny and the positioning of poles on this stretch of road is being reviewed.

Unison Networks advises that further information will be shared once the investigations and review are complete.

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