Safety Advice 05-2001 (B) (NZ)

TRAINEE LINE MECHANIC FATALITY

A trainee line mechanic received a fatal electric shock and burns when he came into contact with a live 11,000 volt pole-mounted fuse assembly. The line mechanic was a member of a six-man crew that was engaged on the construction of a new overhead line near Rotorua in March 2001.

The crew were preparing to lift low voltage conductors into position by means of ropes placed over the lower cross-arms. The work was being carried out under live 11,000 volt conductors that the crew had previously installed on the pole. The trainee was instructed to place a lifting rope over the cross-arm, working from a ladder placed against the pole. He was observed to have safely completed this operation, and was instructed to return to the ground.

Rather than climbing down the ladder as instructed, the trainee climbed from the ladder onto the LV cross-arm, stood up and made hand contact with the top of a live 11,000 volt fuse assembly that had been fitted to feed a transformer that was to be installed on the pole.

Despite the prompt and highly professional emergency response actions taken by the other crew-members, the electric shock and burns sustained by the trainee resulted in his death at the worksite.

A full investigation into the causes of the accident was carried out by the network company and industry consultants. Their investigations failed to find any reasons for, or justification of the trainees' actions. The investigation was also unable to identify any factors associated with the job planning and organising or site safety management that may have contributed to the accident.