

Newsflash - 2018 05**12 April 2018**

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Wood pole collapse during attached climbing work

This newsflash is to make all those involved in the design, setting to work and working at heights on wood poles aware of a recent incident where one of our linesmen was involved in the failure of a pole which collapsed due to rot whilst he was at the pole top. The planned work was a relatively simple and straightforward job involving recovery of a single phase service line which required the disconnection of the service span to the property.

The pole where the service disconnection was being carried out was a 1950 (67 year old), light construction pole and was one of three poles on the overhead service. The linesman carried out a hammer test of the pole which did not identify any issues giving him concern. He decided to climb the pole using manual climbing techniques utilising his harness and pole choker. Whilst working at the pole top to disconnect the service span the linesmen felt the pole move and then start to fall to the ground with him attached. The linesman landed on soft ground suffering injuries which could have been far worse.

The photos below show the site following the incident with the section of the pole from below the ground and 300mm above ground. The below ground section clearly shows the extent of the rot and, despite the pole appearing sound and solid above ground, there was significant decay found below ground.

**Pole butt failure****Below ground section.****300mm Above ground section**

The investigation into the incident concluded that the hammer test was ineffective in detecting wood pole decay below ground level and therefore with immediate notice, additional enhanced safety measures are required in order to confirm the integrity of wood poles prior to climbing.

Linesmen are also reminded of the hierarchy of working at height access methods which should, where reasonably practicable, result in MEWP access being deployed rather than pole climbing.

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The following additional risk control measures shall be taken by all work planners initiating work on wood poles and by linesmen involved in the climbing of wood poles.

Actions for Planners and Linesmen associated with working on wood poles.

1	<p>Work at height on wood poles shall not be carried out where there is any doubt of the integrity of the pole being accessed. All poles over 50 years old shall be considered to be suspect until proved otherwise by the appropriate inspection and testing procedures. Poles over 50 years old or treated with AC500 (see separate brief article - Safety Newsflash 2018-03) shall not be climbed without additional precautions being applied.</p>
2	<p>Working at height hierarchy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poles over 50 years old shall not be climbed where access via a MEWP is reasonably practicable. • Where MEWP access is not practicable, poles greater than 50-years old shall be climbed only after all of the following safety measures are met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Satisfactory visual inspection and hammer test. ○ Successful prod test to the pole including at a depth of 300mm below ground level. ○ The pole(s) are temporarily secured for the duration of the work by a minimum of three guy ropes or props. • Where a MEWP is unavailable due to routine maintenance then consideration must be given to alternative access options, which in the first instance should be pursuing an alternative MEWP.
3	<p>Poles being tested for climbing should be peer checked by a nominated second competent person on site to provide an independent view on the pole suitability to climb and should be recorded on the site specific risk assessment.</p>
4	<p>When issuing work packs the work planners should adhere to the CDM regulations, communicate any known site hazards including decayed poles and make provision for the work to be carried out safely.</p> <p>Pole inspection records must be reviewed as a mandatory requirement in the design and planning stage of projects and additional arrangements included where poles are greater than 50 years old or are within the timeframe for the installation of AC500 treated poles.</p>
5	<p>Where work planners are involved with projects comprising work at height they should conversant with the content of the overhead appreciation course with respect to pole testing training. This should cover, as a minimum, the inspection and testing of poles and consideration to poles greater than 50-years old.</p>