

HSE ALERT

Source of lesson: Incident

RMSS #15101

Tracking # 90

Date: 09/10/14

Overview:

On 7th October, an operator opened an Air Break Switch (ABS) to isolate part of the network at Queenstown. A piece of the ABS broke away during isolation and hit the operator on the left shoulder. The ABS did not pierce the skin, but has left bruising. The same ABS was operated the previous day, without any noticeable defects or faults occurring.

This incident is another in a trend of increasing ABS failures. The reason the incidents are occurring is because the ceramic insulators have been weakened beyond their design stresses, and subsequently fail during normal operation of the switch.

Immediate action required:

The following interim measures apply until further notice:

1. Field crew are to continue using the control measures provided in Red Alert (#87) when operating ABS:
 - Prior to conducting switching, inspect both horizontal and vertical air brake switches using binoculars as close as possible without encroaching on safe approach distances. Use an EWP, or as a last resort, a ladder to inspect the insulator, looking for hairline cracks.
 - Before conducting any air brake switching, ask distribution operations to set the relevant feeder to 'one trip to lock out'.
 - If responding to a fault, conduct a risk assessment to seek alternate isolation points to mitigate the need to operate an ABS.
2. Maintain drop zones: ensure the worksites are clearly marked, additional crew members stand clear of the drop zone during switching and, if applicable, barriers need to be used to prevent pedestrians from entering the drop zone.

On Friday, Field Operations Leaders will review effectiveness of proposed medium term solutions, including engineering controls. The group will also review the current control measures that are in place. An ABS operating procedure will be developed and distributed next week.

