

SAFETY ADVICE 41-2016(NZ)



11KV NEAR MISS SWITCHING INCIDENT

On 31st March 2016 an instruction was given by a Network Control Operator to a Field Operator to close an Air Break Switch (ABS). The instruction to close the ABS was issued as part of a switching operation to isolate 11kV lines to enable replacement of a broken 66kV cross arm.

If the ABS had been closed it would have livened conductors that had been isolated and formed part of a Permit Area to undertake planned work within the same area as the broken 66kV cross arm. Issuer applied earths had been applied to the lines isolated for the planned work.

Livening of these conductors would have exposed field staff involved in the planned work to the risk of serious harm or fatality from direct contact with live conductors.

The investigation has highlighted the importance of strict adherence to procedures (defences) that we use to eliminate or minimise the risk of harm to our people. Specifically in this case:

- That a STOP to any switching must occur whenever an unexpected network status is found, including when unexpected 'do not operate' tags are found on equipment or the open/closed status of equipment is different to that detailed in any switching sheet.
- That systems used to show the status of the network must be maintained to provide real-time information and visibility to all operators who are planning or undertaking switching on the network.
- That in all cases Permits must be returned (not cancelled) by Recipients when incidents occur that may compromise the isolation points or controls applied to Permit Area. The Permit shall only be reissued when the Operations Controller is satisfied that they have certainty over the isolation points and safety measures applied.