TOOLBOX TALK BRIEFKIT

Overhead Power Lines

A toolbox talk ready to deliver for foremen and supervisors. An 8 to 10 minute spoken script plus a briefing register for the team to sign.

REFERENCE	TBT-OVERHEAD-POWER-LINES-001	**DURATION**	8 to 10 minutes
DATE		**SITE**	
TRAINER (PRINT)		**SIGNATURE**	

1 Why it matters

Working near overhead lines is covered by HSE guidance note GS6, Avoiding danger from overhead power lines, and the Electricity at Work Regulations, alongside the Industry Code of Practice for tree work near power lines. The key fact is that electricity can jump a gap. You do not have to touch a line to be killed, it can arc across to you, your tools or a branch if you get close enough. Work near lines that cannot be kept clear should be done with the line isolated by the network operator, or by a team trained and authorised for utility arb work. For the rest of us the rule is simple: keep yourself, your kit and the timber well outside the exclusion distance, every time.

2 PPE required for this task

- Safety helmet (EN 397)
- Eye and face protection
- Close fitting gloves
- Safety boots with good grip
- High visibility clothing on roadside work

3 What to say

Spoken script for the supervisor. Read or paraphrase, in order.

1 Every line is live until the operator says otherwise

Treat every overhead line, cable and even a phone line running alongside as live and dangerous. You cannot tell by looking whether a line is live or what voltage it carries. So we never guess, we never assume it is dead, and we never go on it looking old or sagging. Live until proven otherwise, in writing, by the people who own it.

2 Electricity jumps, so touching is not the point

This is the one people do not know. High voltage electricity can arc across a gap to you, your saw, your pole or a branch before you ever make contact. That is why keeping clear is about distance, not about being careful not to touch. Get inside that distance and it can come to you. No PPE we wear will save you from that, only distance does.

3 Spot the lines before anyone starts

Before work starts we walk the job and find every line, including the ones half hidden in the crown, running to the house, or dropping to a pole across the road. Lines get lost in foliage, so look properly. If there is a line anywhere near the work, it gets flagged and planned before a saw comes out, not noticed halfway up.

4 Keep clear, and the operator sets the distance

Nobody, no tool, no rope, no branch and no length of timber goes inside the exclusion distance for the lines on this job. That distance depends on the voltage and the situation, so your supervisor or the network operator gives you the exact figure and we mark it out. When in doubt, treat it as much further than you think and stay well back.

5 If it cannot be kept clear, the line gets isolated

Where the work genuinely cannot be done outside the safe distance, that is not a reason to have a go closer. It means the job stops until the network operator has isolated the line, or a properly trained and authorised utility arb team takes it on under a permit. That call is not made up the tree, it is made before we start.

6 Watch your conductive kit

Alloy poles, pole saws, wet ropes, ladders and long lengths of timber all conduct, and all extend your reach towards a line without you feeling it. A pole saw lifted up to a branch is a straight path to a line above it. Be very aware of anything long or metal in your hands near lines, and lower it, do not swing it.

7 **Timber, drops and machines near lines**

Think about where material goes, not just where you are. A branch swinging on a rope, a section being lowered, or a crane or MEWP jib can all reach a line. Plan the drops and the machine positions so nothing travels towards the lines, and keep the ground crew clear of where a line could come down.

8 **If a line is touched, keep everyone back**

If a tree, a branch, a machine or a person does contact a line, treat the whole area as live. Do not touch the casualty or the machine, keep everyone back at least the distance you have been given, and call 999 and the network operator straight away. The ground itself can be live around the point of contact, so do not walk into it.

9 **Stuck in a machine, stay put**

If you are in a truck, MEWP or machine that has hit a line, the safest place is usually to stay in it until the power is confirmed off. Only if there is fire or another immediate danger do you get out, and then you jump clear with both feet together and shuffle away without touching the machine and the ground at the same time. We agree this before the job, because it is not something you work out in the moment.

4 Common mistakes to call out

Assuming a line is dead, low voltage or 'only a phone line'

Thinking you are safe as long as you do not actually touch the line

Missing a line hidden in the crown or running to the property

Working inside the exclusion distance to save moving position

Lifting an alloy pole saw, ladder or wet rope up near a line

Swinging or lowering timber and branches towards the lines

Approaching a casualty or machine that is in contact with a line

Climbing out of a vehicle that has hit a line instead of staying put

5 Watch on site this week

What the supervisor should be actively spotting on walk-arounds.

Work planned without walking the site to find the lines first

Lines part hidden in foliage that nobody has flagged

People, poles or ropes drifting towards the exclusion distance

Long conductive kit being used directly under or beside lines

Material being dropped or swung in the direction of the lines

No agreed exclusion distance marked out on the ground

A crew who do not know what to do if a line is contacted

6 Confirm the team understood

Ask one or two of these at the end of the talk.

1. Do you have to touch a power line to be hurt by it? (No. High voltage can arc across a gap, so getting close with yourself, a tool or a branch is enough, which is why we keep well clear.)
2. Where the work cannot be kept outside the safe distance, what happens? (The job stops until the network operator isolates the line, or a trained and authorised utility team does it under a permit. We never just work closer.)
3. What is the danger with a pole saw, alloy pole or wet rope near lines? (They conduct and they extend your reach towards the line without you feeling it, so anything long or metal near lines is a real risk.)
4. A branch brings a live line down across the ground. What do you do? (Keep everyone well back, treat the ground as live, do not touch anyone or anything in contact, and call 999 and the network operator.)

Briefing register: Overhead Power Lines

All operatives who attend this toolbox talk must sign below. Their signature confirms they have heard and understood the briefing.

Briefing delivered by:

Name (print):		**Date:**	
Signature:		**Time:**	
Site:			

Attendees. I confirm I have heard and understood the briefing detailed above:

#	Name (print)	Company / Role	Signature	Date	CSCS / Ticket No.
1					
2					
3					
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12					

Keep this register in the site Safety File. Additional sheets may be appended if more than 12 operatives are briefed.