



Safety Message of the Day for IMEA Members



Cable Safety Considerations for Electric Utility Workers

Over the past decade, there have been multiple incidents where linemen suffered severe burns after attempting to cut into live cables that were either not properly identified or not de-energized. While following proper cable identification procedures may take a bit more time, the time spent is insignificant compared to the potential cost of a worker injury and the long-term consequences that follow.

It's never safe to cut any cable based solely on tags, duct position, cable size, the word of an inspector or coworker, or its proximity to a utility easement. There are tools available that can reliably identify an exposed cable in a ditch. "Reliably" means having the same confidence as if you were inspecting the cable personally from end to end to ensure it's the correct one. Always use a remotely operated mechanical or hydraulic punch to test a cable before cutting it. If you can't confidently identify a buried cable, punching it beforehand is essential to confirm it is not energized.

Additionally, workers must be fully trained in the use of punches and electronic cable identification tools, and know how to properly analyze their readings.

If there is any doubt about the status of a cable to be cut, stop work immediately. Clarify the situation and ensure that everyone involved agrees it's safe to continue before proceeding.