Electrical Contact Sets Off Fireball

A journeyman painter died of massive thermal burns caused when an electrical contact set off an explosion of volatile waterproofing material.

The painter and a co-worker were in the basket of a personlift, designed to lift workers to do tasks in locations off the ground. The lift was enclosed by a metal guardrail. The workers were applying a flammable liquid waterproofing material to the roof of a building. Both were using rollers and extension poles.

The basket of the personlift containing the workers came into contact with an unguarded, energized electrical installation. The painter was holding onto an aluminum pole which touched both the guard rail of the basket and a metal part of the roof, completing a short circuit to ground. He collapsed to the floor of the lift basket. The waterproofing material in the personlift basket ignited into a fireball. His companion jumped through the fire from the lift to the roof. The painter died at the scene; his companion survived with severe burns.

The power company was not contacted for a safety assessment of the site before this job was undertaken. The workers had tied a wooden pallet board with a nylon rope to the outside edge of the lift basket, thinking it would give them some protection from electric shock. This makeshift device did not work. Talk to the power company about hazards before undertaking any such job. Know the dangers and how to protect yourself.