Laborer Electrocuted On Demolition

A laborer involved in the demolition of a building was electrocuted when he came into contact with a live wire.

Most of the wiring had been disconnected, but there were still some live circuits to operate the elevator and the aircraft warning light on top of the building.

It was his partner’s job to work from a personlift and use a cutting torch to remove conduit and piping from the ceiling and walls of the building. It was the victim’s job to pick up and sort these pieces of scrap.

The foreman had shut off a power switch nearby and used an electrical tester on several outlets to determine if the power was off. Meanwhile, the torch operator descended from the lift and left for a few minutes. For an unknown reason, the laborer got into the personlift, put it in gear and started moving it along the wall. The basket of the lift came into contact with a piece of steel conduit which contained wires still connected to a live switch. The victim was trying to cut the live wire with a pair of uninsulated side cutter pliers when he was electrocuted by 600 volts. Because there was no telephone at the site and because of concerns that the lift cage might still be electrified, resuscitation efforts on the victim could not be started until about 45 minutes after the mishap.

A number of circumstances conspired to cause this fatality. The victim took over his co-worker’s job although he had neither training nor permission to do so. There should have been written documentation that all services were off before demolition work commenced. The site supervisor should satisfy himself that all services are off. Pliers and cutters for such work should be insulated.