Overhead Hazard on Underground Job

Two workers trying to repair a pump in a water well were electrocuted when the equipment they were using touched a 12,000-volt overhead power line.

They were setting up a derrick to pull the pump out of the underground well when the contact occurred.

The faulty pump was located on an unoccupied rural property so no one saw the incident happen. Firefighters went to the scene because a neighbor reported a grass fire. They found the electrical contact had started the fire, and they discovered the bodies of the two workers. Both had been thrown several feet by the high voltage jolt which also seared the ground. Rescuers had to wait a half hour until the utility company turned off the power before they could approach the victims.

Investigation disclosed the well and pump had been in place for years before the overhead wires were put up. In other words, the site was originally safe but a hazard developed later. Workers who handle equipment such as pipes, cranes, booms, derricks and ladders must be aware of possible overhead hazards. Always look up and check for wires before lifting these devices into the air. If electrical transmission lines are overhead, determine the voltage by contacting the utility company in order to establish the limits of approach. Electrocution is all too common. In the state and year in which this incident occurred, two percent of industrial fatalities were by electrocution.