Utility Workers – Pre-Job Briefings

What's at Stake?

Failure to identify job hazards is a major concern for utility workers. If an employee doesn't know the dangers involved in their job, they won't be able to protect against them.

Employee failure to identify and grasp jobsite hazards has led to numerous electrical utility accidents. Before ever stepping foot on a work site, employees need to know what hazards exist and what steps to take to reduce the risk of accident and injury.

Job briefings help you plan your work and ensure employee safety, protect equipment, and protect the public from whatever could go wrong. They are delivered by a senior person on the site such as a supervisor, project manager or site foreman.

What's the Danger?

Even the most experienced utility workers need regular reminders of what hazards are around them. The best way to keep them aware of hazards is to start EVERY day with a pre-job briefing. Many regulatory agencies require at least one briefing before each work day or shift. Additional briefings are needed if any "significant changes" that might affect employees' safety occur.

An employee who is working alone is not normally required to conduct a job briefing. Even so, an employer must make sure tasks are planned out, just "as if" a briefing had been required. A supervisor should brief the employee on hazards, work procedures, and safety measures.

How to Protect Yourself

Start by knowing what to expect from a pre-job briefing:

1. Discussion of hazards associated with the job

    - Be reminded where hazard management plans are kept on the site.
    - Supervisor completes a briefing checklist.
    - Be told the Minimum Approach Distances (MAD) for unprotected parts of the body.
    - Discuss “Extended Reach”.
    - The presence of any hazardous substances highlighted, especially in power generation facilities.
    - Other dangers, such as:
        - high air pressure;
        - high water pressure;
        - pressurized chemical injection systems;
        - steam pressure;
        - heat.

2. Review of hazard management plans

    - What is to be done and in what sequence.
    - How it is to be done and by whom.
    - Possible hazards and how they are to be addressed.
    - The status of energy sources.
    - Personal protective equipment requirements.
    - All changes in procedure and scope of the work.

3. How to deal with significant changes

    - Different kinds of tasks on the same shift.
    - New personnel or spectators.
    - Changing weather.
    - Significant delays (e.g., interrupting work for a trouble call, then resuming).
    - Changing scope of work.
    - Unexpected complications, hazards, malfunctions, or distractions.

4. To be brief or not to be

    - Short briefings are needed for:
        - daily updates;
        - routine work;
        - employees’ training and experience are adequate to recognize and avoid hazards.
    - Extensive briefings are needed for:
        - complicated or hazardous work;
        - employees who might not have the experience to recognize and avoid hazards.

5. Remember these meetings are for you and your safety

    - Get involved in the briefing, don’t just listen.
    - Make suggestions about how to stay safe.
    - Raise health and safety concerns.

Final Word

Pre-job briefings are an essential way to keep utility workers safe. It is vital that you pay close attention, no matter how experienced you are or how often you have attended such meetings.