Victim Neglected To Turn Off Breaker

A journeyman electrician was found dead in an office building crawl space after he had changed a ballast.

He was new to the job site but had been given a familiarization tour a few days before the incident. He had been assigned to change the ballast in the overhead light fixture, and been warned to disconnect the equipment.

The victim had used a mechanical device to remove the ceiling panel for access to the 347 volt ballast. He had removed the wrong ceiling panel; the correct one was two panels away. It appears that rather than getting the mechanical device again to remove the correct panel, he crawled on his back along the ceiling duct and was able to stretch over to work on the ballast.

A security guard found the electrician unconscious. Before pulling him out of the duct, fellow workers ran to the locked electrical room to turn off the breaker to the ballast. It appeared the victim had never turned it off, although he had asked the security guard the location of the electrical switch room that morning.

It was a common practice at this work site to put a piece of electrical tape over a breaker which was turned off to warn people not to tamper with it. No tape was found on the breaker. Investigators concluded it was highly unlikely someone had switched the breaker back on.

Failure to lock out a power source led to this fatality. Understand and follow the proper lockout procedures in your work area. This electrocution can serve as a reminder to everyone about the possibility of electrocution during even routine repairs and maintenance. Always make sure the breaker is off before attempting maintenance. Also make sure no one can turn the breaker back on. This is just as important at home as it is at work.