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OSHA Issues Final Electrical Safety Rule—Establishes Web Resource for Guidance

After 40 years, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has revised its electrical safety regulations covering workers performing electric power generation, transmission, and distribution work, first issued in 1972. Dr. David Michaels, assistant secretary of labor for occupational safety and health, announced the final rule by stating: “This long-overdue update will save nearly 20 lives and prevent 118 serious injuries annually... Electric utilities, electrical contractors and labor organizations have persistently championed these much-needed measures to better protect the men and women who work on or near electrical power lines.”

In the final rule, OSHA:

- Adopts a new construction standard on electrical protective equipment, 29 CFR 1926.97.
- Revises the standard on construction of electrical power transmission lines and equipment, 29 CFR 1926, subpart V.
- Revises the general industry standard on electrical protective equipment, 29 CR 1910.137.
- Revises the general industry standard on the operation and maintenance of electrical power generation, transmission, and distribution, 29 CFR 1910.269.
- Revises the general industry standard on foot protection, 29 CFR 1910.136.

The new rule has many components, but two are especially noteworthy. First, the rulemaking is intended to harmonize construction and general industry requirements so that the same rules apply generally to the same kinds of work. For example, an employer replacing a switch on a transmission and distribution system is performing construction work if it is upgrading the cutout, but general industry work if it is simply replacing the cutout with

the same model. Under the existing standards, different requirements apply depending upon whether the work is construction or general industry work, however, under the final rule, the requirements for this task are now the same. Second, the rule now requires employers to estimate the incident heat energy of any electric-arc hazards to which employees would be exposed.

The updated standards for general industry and construction include new or revised provisions for host and contract employers to share safety-related information with each other and with employees, as well as for improved fall protection for employees working from aerial lifts and on overhead line structures. In addition, the standards adopt revised approach-distance requirements to better ensure that unprotected workers do not get dangerously close to energized lines and equipment. The final rule also adds new requirements to protect workers from electric arcs.

The new construction standard for electrical protective equipment applies to all construction work, not just electrical power generation, transmission, and distribution work. The standard replaces the existing construction standard, which was based on out-of-date

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information, with a set of performance-oriented requirements consistent with the latest revisions of the relevant consensus standards. The new standards address the safe use and care of electrical protective equipment, including new requirements for electrical protective equipment made of materials other than rubber.

The final rule became effective on July 10, 2014. However, certain provisions have compliance deadlines after this date, for example, some of the fall protection and minimum-approach distances/insulation, and arc flash personal protective clothing/equipment provisions have a compliance deadline of April 1, 2015, whereas the requirement to estimate the incident heat energy of any electric-arc hazard to which a worker would be exposed is January 1, 2015.

OSHA has established a website entitled “Electric Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution Standard,” which can be accessed at https://www.osha.gov/dsg/power_generation/index.html. The resource offers links to the following:

- *Incident Reports*—describes injuries and fatalities related to electrical work.
- *OSHA® FactSheet: Electric Power Generation, Transmission, and Distribution and Electrical Protective Equipment Final Rule*—summarizes the key provisions of the final rule.

- *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*—covers general questions about the final rule, as well as those related to information-transfer (host-contractor), fall protection, minimum approach-distance, and arc-flash protection questions.
- *Minimum Approach Distance Calculator*—allows the user to calculate minimum approach distances under 29 CFR 1910.269 and 29 CFR Part 1926, Subpart V, by inputting various parameters, such as maximum phase-to-phase system voltage, the maximum transient overvoltage resulting from an engineering analysis of the system, and the elevation of the worksite, answering specific questions, and selecting the desired units.

A copy of the final rule, 29 CFR Parts 1910 and 1926, *Electric Power Generation, Transmission, and Distribution; Electrical Protective Equipment, Final Rule*, which appeared in the Federal Register on April 11, 2014, can be obtained at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-04-11/pdf/2013-29579.pdf>.

For more information on electric arc safety, see, *Electric Arc Flash Protective Clothing*, elsewhere on our Risk Solutions website.

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