

Tear this out  
and share with  
your crew

safety watch | by Amy Materson  
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# Shock-proof yourself

## Know the dangers of working around electricity

**The accident:** A crew was setting anchors in preparation for utility pole placement, using a boom truck with auger. Each anchor was attached to the auger using a coupling, which then used the auger motor to rotate the anchor and screw it into the ground. An anchor began to wobble during the setting process, and a crew member reached out to steady the anchor, unaware the extended boom had touched a 7,200-volt overhead power line. The anchor was energized, electrocuting the worker. He was pronounced dead from electrocution at the hospital.

**The bottom line:** A post-accident investigation found the crew member was not a regular employee, but part of a work release program and had no formal training in the utility construction industry. The training was provided on the job, but as a member of the work release program, the worker was unavailable for regularly scheduled safety training meetings. Additionally, the anchor was a replacement anchor that was more than 2 feet longer than the other anchors used on the project. When the crew tried to set the anchor, the additional length caused it to enter the ground at a difficult angle, creating the wobble that prompted the employee to try steadying the anchor, as well as creating a clearance issue with the overhead power line.



### Unnecessary errors

Working around electricity without the proper training, as this crew member did, can be a fatal mistake. Without the proper training, you won't have the necessary tools to recognize jobsite hazards. The error was compounded by using the longer anchor – material that a jobsite survey would not have accounted for. Although the 6-foot anchors would have been approved by the competent person conducting the survey, once the 8-foot anchor was substituted, the survey would no longer have been applicable to this jobsite.

### Safe steps

- Training – Attend all training sessions and tailgate talks to make sure you're ready to begin work.
- Awareness – Ask what particular hazards the jobsite survey found, and what steps have

been taken to mitigate the hazard. You should remain in a safe area while power is disconnected to the lines.

- Assessment – Before you begin work, walk the site and look for electrical hazards such as overhead power lines. Even if power has been disconnected from the line, stay away. If you're going to be working around them, always keep an eye on how far your equipment is from these lines, particularly when the boom is extended.

If substitute material is brought onto the jobsite, stop and assess what changes need to be made before continuing work. If there are clearance issues or other hazards created, don't continue work until the danger is mitigated.

For detailed information on controlling electrical hazards, visit [osha.gov/Publications/3075.html](https://www.osha.gov/Publications/3075.html).

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Information for this Safety Watch came from an accident report and the Center for Disease Control's NIOSH Fatality Assessment

and Control Evaluation Program. It is designed for general information only.

Date of safety talk: \_\_\_\_\_ Leader: \_\_\_\_\_  
Attending: \_\_\_\_\_

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