

TOOLBOX TALK

Electrical safety toolbox talk

About six minutes · Electricity at Work Regulations 1989

SITE

DATE

GIVEN BY

WHY IT MATTERS

Contact with electricity killed 29 workers in Great Britain in the five years to 2025/26. HSE says over half of the fatal electrical accidents each year involve overhead power lines. Behind those deaths are the shocks that did not kill but left deep burns, stopped a heart or stopped someone breathing for a time, or threw a person off a ladder because the muscles locked and the hand could not let go.

Electricity gives no warning. A damaged lead looks the same whether it is live or not. A cable in the ground looks like a cable in the ground. None of the people in that figure planned to touch anything live. This talk is about the few habits that keep the gap between you and the current.

HSE, Work-related fatal injuries in Great Britain 2025/26, RIDFATAL table 3 (kind of accident, 2025/26 provisional)

THE POINTS TO MAKE

- ☐ **Why the site supply is yellow**
Site tools and lighting run from the 110 volt centre-tapped supply, the yellow leads and transformers, or from batteries, which HSE says are safest. The voltage between a live part and earth is far lower than mains, so a fault is far less likely to kill. If a tool only comes in 230 volts, it needs a 30 milliamp RCD, tested on its button daily, and a supervisor who knows it is on site.
- ☐ **Damaged kit comes out of use**
A damaged lead or tool is taken out of use straight away, labelled do not use, and kept somewhere nobody will pick it up by mistake. Damaged cable is replaced, not taped. Joins are made with proper couplers, never a connector block wrapped in tape. Tell the supervisor so a replacement is sorted and the fault is recorded.
- ☐ **Buried cables: plans, locator, hand dig**
Nobody breaks ground, not even a spade depth for a post, until the plans have been read, the locator has been run and the ground is marked. Plans only show roughly where cables are, so the locator is run again as the dig goes on. Expose a cable by hand, digging alongside it and in from the side, with insulated tools. Find a cable the plans do not show, stop and treat it as live.
- ☐ **Nobody works live**
Work on any electrical equipment is done dead: switched off, locked off, proved dead with a proper tester, and the person doing the work holds the key. Switching off is not isolating, and being told it is dead is not proof. The law allows live work only where making it dead is unreasonable and suitable precautions are in place. That is a competent person with a written reason, not a quick job.
- ☐ **Look at it before you plug it in**
Before you use any lead or tool, with the power off, look at it. Cuts, fraying or heavy scuffing on the lead. A cracked plug or bent pins. Tape joining two leads. Coloured wires showing where the lead enters the plug. Burn marks or staining. A cracked casing or loose screws. Any of those and it does not get used.
- ☐ **Leads off the floor and out of the wet**
Run leads overhead or along the edge, not across walkways, through doorways or where plant and barrows cross them. Keep plugs and sockets off the ground and out of water. Water, mud and damp timber all carry current. If an RCD trips, that is a fault being found, not a nuisance: do not reset it and carry on until the fault is found, and nobody ever bypasses one.
- ☐ **Overhead lines are live, always**
Treat every overhead line as live until its owner confirms it is dead. You do not have to touch a line to be killed; close approach lets the current jump. Plant and long loads go under lines only through the goal posts. If a machine touches a line, the driver stays in the cab, everyone keeps back and someone calls 999. A driver who must get out jumps clear, never touching machine and ground together.
- ☐ **If someone gets a shock**
Do not touch them while they may still be in contact. Switch off at the source or pull the plug. If you cannot, separate them with something dry that does not conduct. Keep everyone away from a fallen overhead line. Call 999 and start first aid. Every shock, even one that seemed to do no harm, is reported and the person is checked. HSE puts it plainly: a shock with no injury means you were lucky.

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TOOLBOX TALK, CONTINUED

Electrical safety toolbox talk: do, do not, and the questions

DO

- Use 110 volt or battery tools on site, and ask before any 230 volt kit comes through the gate.
- Look at every lead, plug and tool before you use it, with the power off.
- Take damaged kit out of use at once, label it and report it.
- Run leads overhead or along edges, and keep plugs and sockets off wet ground.
- Read the plans, run the locator and mark the ground before anyone breaks it.
- Treat every overhead and buried cable as live until its owner confirms otherwise.
- Report every shock, however small, and get the person checked.

DO NOT

- Do not use a lead or tool with a cut, a taped join, exposed wires, a cracked plug or burn marks.
- Do not reset a tripped RCD and carry on without finding out why it tripped.
- Do not dig, drive a pin or auger a hole where the ground has not been scanned and marked.
- Do not take plant, ladders, scaffold tubes or long loads under overhead lines outside the marked route.
- Do not open, repair or alter anything electrical unless that is your trade and the supply is locked off.
- Do not touch someone who is still in contact with electricity. Switch it off first.

ASK THE TEAM

- ? Where is the 230 volt kit on this site today, and what protects the person using it?
- ? What did the last lead you picked up look like, and did you check it before plugging in?
- ? Where are the buried services on this job, and where are the markings?
- ? Which overhead lines are near our access route, and what is in place under them?
- ? If the person next to you got a shock right now, what is the first thing you would do?

TO CLOSE

Nobody reaches for a live cable on purpose. People get hurt because the lead was handy, the plans looked clear, the line looked far enough away, or the job was only going to take a minute. Electricity does not give second chances the way a trip or a slip sometimes does. If you are not sure a lead, a cable or a circuit is dead, treat it as live. Stop, ask, and we will sort it.

Record it. Who gave the talk, where, when, who was there and what was raised. The last page is the record.

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ATTENDANCE RECORD

Electrical safety toolbox talk: given and understood

Each person signs on the day to say they were present and understood the talk. Anyone who joins the team later is given the talk before starting, and signs here.

SITE	DATE	TIME	GIVEN BY
NAME	COMPANY	TRADE OR ROLE	SIGNATURE

QUESTIONS RAISED, AND THE ANSWERS GIVEN	ACTIONS AGREED, WHO AND BY WHEN	
TALK GIVEN BY (SIGNATURE)	POSITION	DATE

MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK REGULATIONS 1999, REGULATION 10: INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES