

# TECHNICAL ADVISORY

## Overhead powerline covers

*Electrical utility workers and their employers*



Electrical utilities are generally the owners of overhead powerlines, and are referred to as such throughout this document. The electrical utilities use qualified powerline technicians with a 434A certification to perform work on their overhead powerlines. These workers are formally authorized by the electrical utility to perform work tasks on or near its energized powerlines. The *Electrical Utility Safety Rules* define an Authorized Worker as one who has been given formal permission by the owner and employer (the local electrical utility) and is competent to perform work in proximity to energized apparatus.

These authorized utility workers also follow specific rules for powerline safety contained in the *Electrical Utility Safety Rules* and the electrical utility's policies. These authorized workers also use specialized equipment and have specialized training. With all this in place, they are equipped to perform work tasks that may include working inside the minimum safe working distances that non-utility workers need to respect. While performing this work, the electrical utility workers may also install powerline covers (typically orange or yellow in colour).

Powerline technicians are trained to use these powerline covers to provide protection against brush contact that may occur during the work process. These covers are not there to provide electrical isolation and protection from electrical contact.

### Dispensing Utility Powerline Covers — Findings and Recommendations

#### Findings

The working group issuing this communication recently conducted a survey of Ontario electrical utility distributors. The working group was initiated by the Provincial Labour Management Safety Committee — Electrical & Utilities (PLMSC-EU), a Section 21 Committee. In the survey, questions were asked to learn what was understood and what the common practices were around the issuance of powerline covers and the results revealed misuse, inconsistent practices, and a general lack of awareness on their use. Some of the findings are listed below:

- Some utilities are issuing covers to non-utility contractors and homeowners.
- The majority of utilities offer alternatives when their practice is not to issue the covers.
- Some utilities issued covers to prevent physical contact, as opposed to being used solely as a visual indicator.
- Some utilities provided safe-use guidance when issuing covers.
- Guidance for the safe use of covers was provided mainly at the time of installation, sometimes at the time of order placement; however, not every respondent provided this guidance.
- Some respondents said they documented their communications on safe use when issuing the covers; however, in other instances the communication was verbal.

## Recommendations

When a utility provides powerline covers for non-utility workers (such as contractors in construction and telecommunications, or homeowners, etc.) the following practices are recommended:

- a) Test powerline covers on a regular basis in accordance with the Electrical Utility Safety Rules, and the electrical utility's policies.
- b) The electrical utility should communicate and ensure the non-utility contractor/homeowner receives the following guidance:
  1. Covers are intended solely as a visual indicator
  2. Despite the covers, all personnel and equipment must still remain outside the safe limits of approach as defined in EUSR Rule 129.
- c) The communication referred to in (b) should be documented, and include a sign-off by the contractor/homeowner indicating that they understand the purpose and limitations of the covers.
- d) Installed powerline covers should be inspected on a regular basis for gaps, and loose or fallen covers.
- e) Consider the use of flags rather than covers, to provide the desired visual indication. Flags (visual warning markers) might emphasize that the protection is intended as a visual indicator only.

This publication was developed by the Provincial Labour-Management Safety Committee – Electrical Utilities, in partnership with the Infrastructure Health & Safety Association (IHSA)