Guidance on performing powerline technician (PLT) tasks during COVID-19

Overview
This is not a legal document and employers are advised to seek legal advice.

Employers and constructors have obligations to protect workers from hazards in the workplace as set out in the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and its regulations and the directives coming from the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Workers should raise any concerns to their:
• Supervisor
• Joint health and safety committee
• Health and safety representative

This will help ensure the employer has taken all reasonable precautions.

Ontario is currently in the midst of a global pandemic. While the COVID-19 situation is changing rapidly, the legislation and regulations used to govern Ontario’s workplaces are not.

Under Ontario law, employers have the duty to keep workers and work sites safe and free of hazards. Workers have the right to refuse unsafe work. If health and safety concerns are not resolved internally, a worker can seek enforcement by filing a complaint with the ministry’s Health and Safety Contact Centre at 1-877-202-0008. Failure of the employer or constructor to comply with the OHSA and its regulations could result in a stop-work order upon inspection by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

Recognize hazards and assess risks
How does the coronavirus spread? The virus typically spreads through coughing and sneezing, personal contact with an infected person, or touching an infected surface and then your mouth, nose, or eyes.

Potential exposures while performing PLT work include:
• Close contact with other personnel in vehicles and during the performance of the tasks, either overhead or underground.
• Close contact with customers when addressing outage concerns or notifications.
• Handling materials and tools passed between crew members.
• Handling materials obtained from stores or outside deliveries.
• Sharing the same facilities as other staff (e.g., washroom, kitchen, locker rooms, staff lounges, vehicles, shop areas, stores, stations, etc.).

For more information visit ihsa.ca/COVID-19
Guidance on performing powerline technician (PLT) tasks during COVID-19 con’t

**Controls**

**Maintain physical distancing.** Physical distancing means maintaining a distance of at least two metres (six feet) or more between persons. Physical distancing is the best way to minimize the transmission of COVID-19, as prescribed by all levels of government and health organizations. By practising physical distancing, you are less likely to be exposed to a respiratory virus.

- Always practice physical distancing between coworkers, contract staff, and customers:
  - In the shop area
  - During truck set-up and job review
  - During scheduled breaks
  - During teardown of work site and return to shop or reporting facility
- Ensure the worksite is large enough to allow for physical distancing, as well as to keep members of the public at a safe distance. Should customers approach the work area, instruct them to adhere to strict physical distancing requirements and ensure you do not approach customer premises for any reason.
- Travel to and from the work site in separate vehicles.

**Minimize sharing of tools and equipment.**

- Perform verbal tailboard talk prior to starting task, with employees providing signatures using their own pen – not sharing pens or pencils.
- Limit the transfer of tools and materials between yourself and coworkers, as documented in the job plan/tailboard.
- Do not share rubber gloves and PPE.
- Upon return to shop area or reporting facility, ensure trucks and equipment are properly disinfected to minimize transfer of any possible contaminants. If it’s practical, workers should use the same vehicle each day.

**Follow PLT procedures.** As an employee you have the right to know, the right to participate, and the right to refuse unsafe work. Ensure all proper protocols are followed for all situations, including informing the JHSC of any concerns.

- Only perform tasks assigned by your supervisor. If these tasks are deemed necessary, ensure that the required materials are not transferred to prevent contamination (e.g., pick up materials from the established staging area, where physical distancing can be maintained).
- If close proximity is normally required for a task, ensure the best option is utilized to maintain physical distancing (e.g., using two trucks to perform a task, as opposed to two PLTs in a double bucket truck).
- If physical distancing is not an option for a required task, precautions must be adhered to and appropriate measures taken to protect yourself. Contact your supervisor for further instructions (e.g., PPE requirements).
- Ensure enough cleaning supplies and materials and PPE are available for your task so that tools and equipment can be disinfected for the next shift.
- Ensure notifications from JHSC and other business or trade related information is communicated, electronically if possible, to all fellow staff on a regular basis.
- Create a dialogue with all staff involved in the task about their physical and mental well-being (stress at home and stress surrounding COVID-19 should not be dismissed, as everyone reacts differently to stressful situations). Encourage fellow staff to utilize EAP program as necessary.

For more information visit [ihsa.ca/COVID-19](http://ihsa.ca/COVID-19)
Guidance on performing powerline technician (PLT) tasks during COVID-19 con’t

Practise good hygiene. Health Canada recommends following these basic hygiene practices:
• Wash hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds frequently throughout the day, or whenever you suspect you have been in contact with an infected piece of equipment or tool.
• If using hand sanitizers, they must be alcohol based (with greater than 60% alcohol) to be effective.
• Sneeze or cough into a tissue and discard it in refuse container, or cough into your elbow or sleeve.

Evaluate
Review your activities during all PLT tasks and look for opportunities to improve your processes. Evaluate your cleaning and sanitizing processes to identify any issues (availability of product, effectiveness of product, disposal of materials, etc.). Communicate or report any changes needed or any new issues as they arise to your supervisor for input and support.

Monitor your supplies. There may be extended periods of work if a weather situation or equipment malfunction occurs, so monitor your supply of disinfectant wipes, products, and all PPE to ensure you have sufficient supplies for the duration of an extended work shift.

Stay home if you are feeling ill. If you begin to feel unwell while at work (fever, new cough or difficulty breathing, etc.), you should immediately:
1. Isolate yourself from other workers and go home. If possible, avoid public transit.
2. Wash or disinfect your hands, avoid touching common surfaces as well as your face, and put on a facemask if one is available.
3. Advise your supervisor and JHSC immediately of your concerns so they are aware of the situation and can notify others who may have been exposed.

Resources
Stay updated with daily government updates on COVID-19:
Government of Ontario
Government of Canada
Public Health Ontario

Anyone who is concerned they may have been exposed to, or is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, should start by visiting the Ministry of Health website and take their self-assessment. You should contact your primary care provider or Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000. Do not call 911 unless it is an emergency.

For more information visit ihsa.ca/COVID-19