



Do we need more regulation in the Electric Transmission and Distribution (ETD) Industry?

This question is raised occasionally in the ETD safety & health community when we look inwards with a critical eye to make sure there are no gaps. Without a doubt, our industry has been getting consistently safer since the first set of hooks sank into a utility pole over a hundred years ago. Advances in PPE, work methods, safer equipment, hazard management, and training have taken it from a dangerous job to one that is hazardous. For some, this may seem like the same thing, but it is not. Today, NECA contractors and IBEW line workers plan their work, identify hazards, and develop plans to manage them.

That doesn't mean we have it all figured out. We continue to see fatalities each year that could have been prevented. The real question is what was the root cause? And how often are fatal accidents the result of lacking procedures, standards, or regulation? The ETD industry is highly regulated, the workers are highly trained, and employers are consistently refining procedures through operating experience. Don't get me wrong, there will always be new technology and advancements in safety that will require careful review and improvement of regulations and standards. We need to continuously improve until we eliminate serious injuries and fatalities year over year. We need to dig deep into human performance and understand the inherent risk in our organizations, the fallibility of human beings, and the imperfection in our systems.

Most ETD regulations are what are called "Performance Based" standards. For example, the requirement in OSHA 1926 Subpart V to "prevent each employee from being exposed to hazardous differences in electric potential." provides the objective, but it is left to the employer to develop practices and procedures to achieve it. To achieve the objective, the employer may choose to isolate their employee from the hazard, insulate their employee from the hazard, or de-energize and apply equipotential grounding methods. Each of these will protect the worker from hazardous differences in electric potential and now the employer/crew can decide which is best considering the environment and scope of work. This approach is ideal for our industry as it allows for critical thinking and the development of best practices that can be applied to a wide range of circumstances, which are highly variable at times.



Many safety advancements have come from within the industry and often from the folks who put themselves on the line every day. This pride in our trade is the greatest tool in our toolbox. We need to continue to leverage employee engagement, management support, and safety & training expertise to reach our goal. Together we can do this!

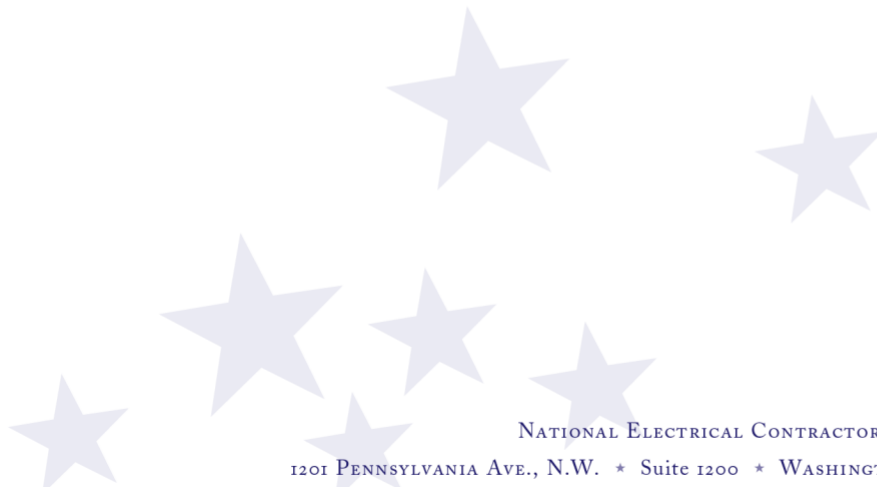
Please reach out to me if you think there are gaps in OSHA regulations or within consensus standards such as ANSI, ASTM, or IEEE that need to be addressed. Please share success stories that highlight the dedication of NECA contractors and IBEW line workers as we move towards eliminating serious injuries and fatalities on the line.

Thanks,

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