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Farmers warned of deadly risk

A series of incidents involving machinery bringing down power lines in the past week has prompted an urgent warning from SA Power Networks of the deadly threat posed by power lines on rural properties.

“In the past week we have had seven separate machinery and vehicle incidents involving damage to our power lines in rural areas,” said Paul Roberts, Manager Stakeholder Relations for SA Power Networks.

- On Monday 8 May, about 50 customers lost power when farm machinery brought down eight spans of line on our Loxton South 19,000 Volt SWER (Single Wire Earth Return) in the Riverland.
- On Wednesday 10 May, more than 600 customers lost power when a tractor knocked down a power pole on our 33,000 Volt line between Hummocks and Ardrossan on Yorke Peninsula, and 74 customers were affected when a boom sprayer contacted the Alma 19,000 Volt SWER in the Mid North.
- On Saturday 13 May, a crane working on a wind farm caused another outage, initially affecting 100 customers, when it pulled down lines on the 19,000 Volt Caltowie SWER in the Mid North.
- On Sunday 14 May, 84 customers lost power when a farmer towing a large aerial brought down a 19,000 Volt SWER line at Marrabel and six customers were affected when a grain header contacted the line on the Hanson 19,000 Volt SWER near Burra.
- Late in the evening on Monday 15 May, farm machinery brought down part of the Parrakie 19,000 Volt SWER line in the Mallee, affecting supply for about 20 customers.

“We often respond to outages that have been caused by activity on farms during intense work periods. Right now, many farmers are preparing for planting and working beyond the end of daylight, so these incidents are an important reminder of the risk,” Mr Roberts said.

He said it was essential that farmers ensured anyone working on their property was aware of the location of power lines and carry out a safety check before starting a task.

“Farmers need to be aware of the voltage of the line and the appropriate safe distances for working near those lines. The higher the voltages, the greater the clearances required to stay safe,” he said.

A range of power lines cross South Australian farms, including transmission lines over 275,000 Volts mounted on steel-framed towers, and 66,000 Volt and 33,000 Volt lines strung between taller Stobie poles and linking SA Power Networks’ substations.

Then there are Single Wire Earth Return, or SWER lines, which carry 19,000 volts and constitute about 30% of the SA electricity distribution network. These SWER lines are difficult to see as they are thin, single lines strung tightly between poles that can be hundreds of metres apart.

What to do if you contact a power line

When an object or vehicle comes into contact with power lines there is a high risk of electric shock. If this happens, you should immediately contact SA Power Networks on 13 13 66 and (preferably) do not move from the vehicle until the power is switched off.

If it is necessary to evacuate the vehicle to prevent injury, several steps must be followed to maximise your safety, including:

- Jump out and clear of the vehicle, ensuring you do not touch the vehicle and the ground at the same time.
- Calmly walk away using very small steps.
- Call SA Power Networks immediately on 13 13 66.
- Do not return to the vehicle and keep other people well clear until after the area has been made safe.

In a power emergency call 13 13 66. For an ambulance or police assistance, call 000.

SA Power Networks distributes a range of information on the risks associated with power lines on rural properties. For more information, go to:

http://www.sapowernetworks.com.au/centric/corporate/safety/look_up_and_live.jsp