

NATF Redacted Operating Experience Report

Pole Slide Incident

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Topic

Pole Slide Incident

Description

Upon completing work to replace a primary cross arm on a wood pole, an apprentice lineman began descending the pole. After transferring his fall restraint equipment (FRE) belt below the phone and cable lines, he continued to descend when his belt snagged on a splinter or nail on the back side of the pole. The apprentice attempted to un snag his belt, by reaching around the pole. This movement brought his body closer to the pole, causing his gaffs to become parallel to the pole instead of maintaining a 30-45 degree angle (see figure 1). At that time, the apprentice's gaffs came away from the pole. The apprentice immediately hugged the pole, resulting in slack in the FRE (see figure 2). With the FRE unable to cinch the pole, the apprentice slid down the pole approximately 12 feet landing on his feet. The apprentice was treated for a large splinter in his bicep and returned to duty after a day off.



Fig. 1. Falling back position; gaffs 30-45 degrees



Fig. 2. Body into the pole; parallel gaffs

Lessons Learned

1. Apply the following when climbing a pole:
 - a. Slow down and stay focused on your body position.
 - b. Maintain a proper gaff angle (30-45 degrees) to ensure gaffs are fully engaged in the pole and maintain proper tension.
 - c. Adhere to basic climbing principles, even with new equipment and techniques.
2. Remember every action has a reaction.
3. Adjust FRE to manufacturer's instructions.

Actions Taken

This event was reviewed with line personnel during safety meetings. The review covered proper climbing techniques, including the basics.

Extent of Condition

Climbing and descending wood poles is performed by line personnel throughout North America. The risk of falling can be minimized through the proper use of FRE and climbing techniques.