Don’t Get Shocked Doing it Your Way



Safety Talk

Shortcuts can cause long-term injuries. Here’s a story of one worker who couldn’t be bothered to lock out.

Jim enjoyed startup assignments because he was independent by nature, and the nature of the work let him do it his way most of the time. Jim was not fond of the rules the company made him follow and felt that some of the imposed job standards just “got in the way” and slowed him down. Jim knew the company’s lockout/tagout procedure and paperwork would take him at least 20 minutes, so he did what he always did when nobody was looking: he did it ‘his way’.

WHAT CAN GO WRONG

Jim worked inside an energized building working on a control panel. He was working on tightening a loose screw at the rear of the panel, while the panel was live. He could see the loose screw through a small space between the breakers, unaware that they too, were energized.

He reached between the wires with his screwdriver to tighten the screw. Jim also had to remove his safety glasses so he could get a closer look. His apprentice didn’t think this was a good idea, but didn’t speak up.

Unfortunately, the high voltage inside the panel arced to the metal shaft of the screwdriver and Jim caught the brunt of the electric shock. He received flash burns on his hands and arms, and a piece of the melted screwdriver flew into his right eye. His apprentice also suffered minor flash burns and a broken rib when Jim’s flailing right arm struck him and knocked him against a piece of iron.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

When working on energized electrical equipment, remember the following important tips:

- Never attempt to work on any energized equipment unless you have been specifically trained, qualified and authorized to do so.
- Always follow established standard operating procedures.
- Never take shortcuts. It takes only a fraction of a second for a mistake to cause serious injury.
- When testing electrical parts, use a meter whenever possible and be aware of what you are grounded to.
- Use rubber matting to cover the floor and exposed electrical conduits not being

tested.
- Use the correct personal protective equipment (PPE): non-conducting gloves, shoes, safety glasses and other clothing.
- Do not wear jewelry when working around electrical current.

FINAL WORD

Jim won’t have to worry about company procedures anymore. The injuries to his hands and eye have forced him to retire. He paid a high price for the few minutes he saved by not following lockout procedures. If you perform work “your way,” make sure it’s the right way to protect you from injury.