Time Management: Taking Time for Hazard Assessments Fatality File

US Engineering Services employees electrocuted while servicing HVAC systems

On August 24, 2022, a fourth-year apprentice HVAC technician employed by U.S. Engineering Services was fatally electrocuted while repairing HVAC equipment at University Academy, a college prep charter school in Kansas City, Missouri. The worker came into contact with energized parts during the repair task.

A subsequent federal investigation by the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) found that the company had failed to de-energize the equipment before work began and had not taken steps to prevent the equipment from unintentionally restarting during the repair. OSHA also found the company failed to conduct hazard assessments to identify personal protective equipment needs and other safety requirements for field employees at contracted sites.

What made this tragedy especially alarming was that it was not the first. A year earlier, in July 2021, another HVAC technician from the same company was fatally electrocuted under nearly identical circumstances while working on a rooftop air conditioning unit in Wichita, Kansas – a unit that had not been drained of all its energy before work began. A federal investigation found the company failed to follow required procedures which would have prevented the incident, a violation cited by federal investigators in July 2021, when another company HVAC technician was fatally electrocuted while working on a rooftop air conditioning unit not drained of all its energy.

In both cases, the workers were servicing equipment under time and operational pressure. In both cases, the hazard assessment step – the check that would have identified the live energy source and triggered the appropriate lockout/tagout controls – was not completed before work began.

The 2022 worker did not survive. He was the second person from the same company to die for the same reason, under the same preventable conditions.

Source: https://www.dol.gov