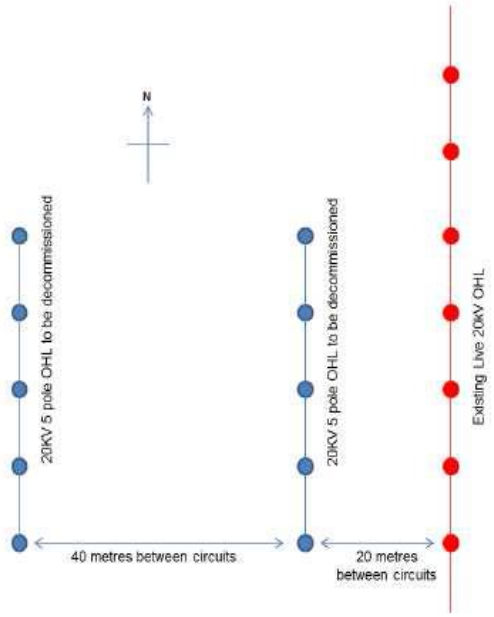
Safety Bulletin

Fatal incident involving two French linesmen

Two linesmen working for one of French electricity distributors were recently tragically electrocuted when they came into contact with a live 20kV overhead line. The company involved had a job to decommission two separate five pole sections of 20kV overhead line which had been physically disconnected from the Electricity Company's system. Underground cables had been installed and these two separate circuits were redundant.
In the immediate vicinity were 3 separate overhead line circuits running at 20kV, parallel to each other. An outer and middle circuit some 40m apart, where both de-energised and due to be recovered (shown in blue). A third line running in parallel was energised and in service. All the circuits were in farmland and between two of the circuits was a small wood, which prevented line of sight identification. The diagram (right) and the photograph (below) show the three separate circuits and the distance between them.



The Project Manager instructed the linesmen from his office using a plan as reference. The men then drove to site parking their MEWP alongside the circuit they thought was isolated ready to commence decommissioning works. At this stage it is not known why the linesmen accessed the live line in their MEWP but the result was that both linesmen received a fatal electric shock. The men were discovered by another overhead line team. There was no voltage tester found at the scene.

Learning points

1. When working adjacent to parallel circuits a SAP must be appointed to be responsible for electrical safety and issue appropriate Safety Documentation on site
2. Linesmen must ensure they have proved the circuit dead and earthed the line, or be in sight of an existing portable earth applied to the line prior to starting work
3. The PTW holder is responsible for ensuring staff under their control are competent, authorised for the work in hand, and understand the work content including the operational status of adjacent equipment. This is an essential part of the Risk Assessment and formal set to work routine