

LUCELEC Expands Live Line Maintenance Techniques

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St Lucia Electricity Services Limited (LUCELEC) has added a new dimension to its live line work, introducing eight members of its Transmission and Distribution Department to the rubber glove method of line maintenance.

During live line work, linesmen repair high voltage lines without shutting off the power. The rubber glove method allows these crews to work directly on the lines with their hands protected by gloves. Previously, the company used the “hot stick” method of live line maintenance where crews use insulating poles to maintain a specified distance from the lines while working.

The new method builds on the “hot sticks” technique and in some instances will be used in tandem with them. Training in the new method was done during a three day session held at the company’s Cul-de-Sac compound.

LUCELEC’s Transmission and Distribution Manager Mr Gilroy Pultie says the company has been repairing and upgrading its electrical network under live line conditions for the past five years. This, he says, has had double rewards. First, it ensures service to customers is not interrupted during these operations. Secondly, through regular maintenance, upgrades and improvements to the electricity infrastructure, customer satisfaction remains high.

“Because we are doing it live, nobody’s actually being affected and so from our customer’s point of view it is very good that we are able to maintain our system to a large extent without outages,” says Mr Pultie.

He adds that introducing live line work to LUCELEC personnel through the “hot sticks” method has resulted in even greater improvements in the company’s safety culture. This in turn, laid the foundation for adding the rubber gloves method.

“A lot of training has gone into it and there are many levels of protection. The lines are covered with insulating material, the crews use gloves that are fully tested and even the truck that they work from is designed to protect them if the other two levels of protection fail,” Pultie noted.

Sixty-five per cent (65%) of the maintenance conducted on the LUCELEC network is done under live line conditions. For the time being, only pole replacements are done exclusively in conditions where the power to the lines must be cut. However, that is projected to change by the end of 2013 when Transmission and Distribution crews are expected to use live lines in all aspects of their work on the network.

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