

Construction Line Crew 'Hot-Sticking'

Emphasis is on safety while working on energized lines

By Barbara Patterson

KPUD linemen hanging from power poles with long orange sticks in their hands is a familiar sight in Klickitat County.

These highly trained linemen are working on "hot" or energized lines—lines they definitely don't want to touch with their bare hands. The orange sticks—or hot sticks—take the place of hands-on work.

Made from non-conducting fiberglass, hot sticks act as insulators. Linemen attach various accessories to the hot sticks, depending on the job that needs to be done.

For example, if cotter pins—which hold parts together—need to be removed, the lineman attaches the correct tool or accessory to the hot stick to complete the job.

The hot stick does the intricate work, controlled by the lineman's hand, so the lineman is never in direct contact with the lines he is working on.

The KPUD construction line crew works on energized lines 75 percent of the time, according to Journeyman Lineman Rob Rising.

Rob says the reason is to prevent long outages.

This specialized line crew often builds new electric transmission and distribution lines and equipment. They also maintain existing power lines.

The work often can take several days to weeks to complete.



The KPUD construction line crew includes, from left, Journeyman Lineman Rob Rising, Journeyman Lineman John Bellamy, Line Foreman Kip Graves and Operator Mike Purdy.

KPUD's other two line crews—in White Salmon and Goldendale—work primarily on bringing service to homes and businesses.

Recently, the construction line crew worked on a power pole in Ekone Park in Goldendale, redirecting the lines from a vertical to a horizontal position, using hot sticks. The lines were carefully moved and attached to a horizontal cross arm to run side by side rather than being stacked vertically.

In winter, snow on stacked lines can make them sag and could cause power problems.

The circuits on this pole feed Bickleton Highway, Bickleton, Roosevelt and the landfill gas plant. A circuit also feeds the north section of downtown Goldendale on the same pole.

The long-range plan is to install a new feeder from this location that will go underground toward Satus Pass.

The job at Ekone was complicat-

ed and had to be carefully planned. Switching from vertical to horizontal was a new procedure for the crew. Because it was scheduled to last several days, the crew elected to do the work "hot."

Otherwise customers would have been out of power several hours a day for several days in a row during this project.

Kip Graves, construction line crew foreman, says state and federal laws regulate work on energized lines. Linemen must know how to apply the regulations.

"These are good laws," Kip says. "They are designed to keep us safe."

All KPUD line crews attend hot stick school in the Tri-Cities area. The emphasis is on safety.

"The union is also strict about these safety regulations," says Rob.

KPUD construction crew members also include Journeyman Lineman John Bellamy and Mike Purdy, groundman-operator. ■