

The Electric Power Industry: Lighting the Way for Safety and Health Programs



Safe, reliable, affordable, and increasingly clean energy is essential to the U.S. economy and our way of life. Electricity powers our homes, offices, and industries; provides communication, entertainment, and medical services; powers various technologies and keeps us connected; and runs many forms of transportation. Most of us take electricity for granted—we expect that the lights will always come on when we flip a switch.

The dedicated men and women who work in the electric power industry are critical to ensuring this reliability, and the industry is committed to protecting their health and safety.

To keep workers safe on the job, the electric power industry relies on a powerful tool: **safety and health programs** that focus on prevention. These programs are an integral part of the industry’s safety culture and share several key traits:

- **Management leadership:** Management provides the resources, leadership, and example to actively foster a culture of safety.
- **Worker participation:** The industry relies on strong, collaborative labor-management relationships to keep workers safe.
- **Coordination at multi-employer worksites:** Timely, thorough communication and coordination between host employers and contractors are crucial to keeping everyone on a worksite safe.

The industry focuses on prevention—identifying and fixing hazards before they cause harm—as a shared responsibility of labor and management. This focus helps the industry maintain reliability for its customers, while also ensuring the safety and health of its workers. The following stories provide examples and inspiration for companies and workers in any industry working toward the linked goals of zero injuries and business success.

The Electrical Transmission & Distribution Partnership

The Electrical Transmission & Distribution (ETD) partnership, begun in 2004, is a formal collaboration of labor and management stakeholders who work together to improve safety in the electric line construction industry. Its focus is preventing injuries and illnesses through education and development of best practices.



OG&E employees and mutual assistance crew participate in a safety briefing.

The partnership includes 17 industry leaders, including the CEOs of more than a dozen of the largest union and non-union electrical infrastructure contractors in the nation. Other members include the Edison Electric Institute (EEI), the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and the National Electrical Contractors Association (NECA).

The partnership prioritizes analyzing incident data to find common causes of injuries and identifying training criteria for forepersons, supervisors, lineworkers, and apprentices. It highlights many safety messages and best practices that affect workers on a daily basis. Examples include best practices for job briefings, the use of insulating rubber gloves, and instructions for a “qualified observer” who can, for example, ensure that clearances are maintained and that effective rubber cover-ups are installed.

The partnership has developed 14 best practices that members have implemented. These best practices are available to member contractors as well as non-members through the [OSHA website](#), the [partnership website](#), and the ETD partnership app. The ETD partnership leads the way as the only national OSHA partnership that collaborates to prevent injuries through education and implementation of industry best practices.



Labor and the Industry: A Code of Excellence Story

As part of the industry's commitment to safety, electric companies across the nation have partnered with IBEW. This partnership brings with it a heightened focus on safety by companies and workers, with a visible commitment by all employees to do work correctly the first time, at the highest levels of safety and quality. IBEW has instituted a Code of Excellence that emphasizes safety, instructing workers to collaborate with management to prevent incidents. It sets the expectation of safe operations for the companies and the workers, while giving customers what they expect from their electric companies: a safe and reliable supply of energy.



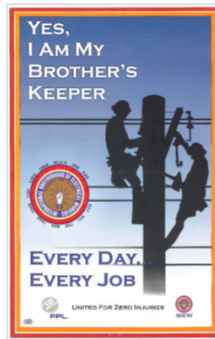
- Biannual business reviews with FPL's senior executives.
- Active union participation in:
 - Creating innovative apprentice and journeyman training programs.
 - Employee engagement teams.
 - Technology development and customer service excellence teams.

Partnership in Action: The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and Florida Power & Light

In 2009, IBEW partnered with Florida Power & Light (FPL) to roll out the Code of Excellence across the state. Investing time, energy, and resources to build a collaborative relationship has proven to be valuable for FPL employees, customers, and shareholders. Since 2009, FPL has had the best safety record in its operational history, with more productive and engaged employees and best-in-class customer performance metrics.



After FPL and IBEW implemented the Code of Excellence, a backlog of more than 1,500 grievances filed by local union members fell to less than 150 over a four-year period. Additionally, FPL's OSHA-reportable incidents fell by 50 percent, enhancing morale and saving lives. Safety is the electric power industry's number-one priority. The processes implemented, overseen by joint teams of FPL management and union workers, demonstrate this commitment.



FPL and IBEW are committed to improving engagement, productivity, and safety. Some of the steps taken to fulfill this commitment include:

- Monthly business unit performance reviews, involving senior company leaders and the union committee, to develop strategic solutions to real-world problems.
- Monthly healthcare committee meetings that address wellness and benefits challenges.

Stronger Together: Utility Workers Union of America and Consolidated Edison of New York, Inc.

Consolidated Edison of New York (Con Edison) has adopted an overarching vision of zero harm. Making progress toward that vision requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders.



Because no one person or group has all the answers, it is essential to build constructive relationships to identify opportunities to help employees work safer. Recognizing that improving safety comes from working together, Con Edison and the Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA) partnered to provide tools to help workers avoid injuries and look out for others. An example of that partnership is Systems of Safety, a day-long peer-to-peer class where employees sharpen their hazard mitigation skills and are encouraged to exercise responsibility for their own well-being.

“When it comes to safety, you need that organic element of employees having conversations with each other, regardless of title or experience,” says Con Edison Director of Safety Gregg Slintak. “Systems of Safety helps equip people to take ownership of their own safety and promote a safer workplace.”

Systems of Safety began in 2010 when a group including Con Edison Chairman and CEO John McAvoy (then a senior vice president) collaborated with UWUA Local 1-2 leadership to create a workplace safety class taught by and for employees. The class also helps employees better understand company culture, enhance teamwork, develop leadership skills, and use error-avoidance tools to work injury-free.

More than 6,000 employees have taken the Systems of Safety class and dozens of UWUA members have become Systems of Safety instructors. In each class, about 30 employees engage in open dialogue around structured workplace scenarios. This approach helps to promote open conversation around topics that might be difficult to discuss on the job. Systems of Safety provides a safe and constructive environment for participants to freely share their thoughts and ideas. Everyone comes away with a broader perspective on safety.



“What I really like about the class,” one employee says, “is that while you promote safety, you meet people you don’t usually work with and it makes you feel more a part of the company.”

The Con Edison/UWUA partnership emphasizes that injuries should never be considered acceptable or “part of the business.” The shared effort is equipping employees to prevent injuries on the job and elsewhere.

Customized Safety Leadership: National Grid

National Grid—an energy company with service territories in Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island, as well as the U.K.—has taken a multi-layered approach to managing safety and health. The method centers around safety plans developed at each level of the company and customized for a specific level of leadership.



National Grid’s executive leadership safety plan includes tactics to demonstrate the company’s commitment to safety efforts, increase executive knowledge of issues and challenges, and find opportunities for executive influence and support of lower-level plans. Executive actions include routine formal reviews of injury trends and local plans to address key issues, attendance commitments at various safety committees with an eye on long-term agenda items, and a focus on opportunities to support the team’s incident-prevention efforts. Executives also visit with frontline employees to discuss their concerns and look for actionable items that will showcase their commitment to safety and convey that safety should remain the top priority for everyone.

At the local level, field safety plans provide an opportunity to partner with local union leaders, with a focus on how workers can increase awareness and help reduce injuries. They often include action items, such as conducting quarterly safety campaigns that focus on local incident trends, employee recognition, training, peer-to-peer observations, housekeeping initiatives, and more. National Grid’s goal is for local teams to gain an understanding of the incidents they experience and their exposure to risk, and to create safety plans based on consensus that lead to optimal implementation.

Collaboration among executives, management, and frontline workers is critical to ensuring an effective safety process. Employees are responsible for reviewing their plans with their managers on a monthly basis to discuss key issues, identify challenges and needed support from others, and reinforce a detailed approach to safety improvement. According to National Grid’s Senior Vice President of Safety, Health and Environment, Jeannette Mills, the company is working to establish a culture in which each level of union and management leadership is involved in a comprehensive safety management system, reinforcing a culture of safety embraced by all National Grid employees.

Workforce and Management Collaboration: Eversource

Eversource Energy, which serves customers in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New



Hampshire, has made safety a way of life. The company has shown the value of employee involvement, one of the core elements of any effective safety and health program. By listening to workers who understand the risks associated with specific tasks, Eversource leverages real-world experience to benefit all employees and to address safety concerns. With a focus on management and labor working together, everyone in the company has a responsibility to emphasize going home safely. “UWUA has a long history of advocating worker safety, so Local 369’s partnership with the company is a key focus for our members and union leadership,” says UWUA Local 369 President, Craig Pinkham.



Eversource management (at right) waits to be fully briefed and signed into the work area, while the crew leader finishes a pre-job brief with other workers.

Eversource has identified three key principles that govern its safety culture: honesty, respect, and commitment.

Eversource has engaged in several activities to ensure that its workforce has a personal interest in recognizing risks, speaking freely, and reporting any identified hazards:

- Joint union and management safety committees that meet regularly including the annual Executive Labor Management Safety Summit with the leadership of the six locals and senior officers of operations.
- Continuous communication on safety trends and best practices, followed by action to reduce incidents.
- Giving employees the opportunity to stop when an unforeseen hazard is identified.

These activities, and others, have helped Eversource identify enhanced safety protocols and practices that work. For example, listening to workers’ concerns about the physical demands of their jobs led to a mobility ergonomic program that improved worker flexibility, reduced cumulative trauma, and taught workers about safer work practices. Another example is the transition to more flexible rubber gloves to reduce hand strain.

Additionally, Eversource’s Safety Incident Reporting System provides multiple ways to reduce injuries through improvement plans and communications. When an incident occurs, the first concern is employee well-being. After an employee is evaluated and receives care, the process of prevention begins with the reporting system.





The event or injury is documented with all of the immediate facts, and a communication is automatically sent out across the company for management personnel to share with their employees who work with similar exposure. An incident analysis commences to prevent recurrence, and the improvement plans are communicated across the enterprise to potentially exposed workers. These communications have improved awareness and ownership of the safety culture. Eversource believes safety is not done to you, it is done with you, so the respective joint safety committees of the IBEW and UWUA work tenaciously with the company to make sure everyone goes home safely every day.



Eversource lineworkers and splicers participate in mobility training to learn techniques to improve flexibility and warm up prior to work at their job sites.

Identifying and Reducing Hazards: Oklahoma Gas & Electric

Over four days in May 2013, strong storms and several tornadoes—including the widest tornado ever recorded, at 2.6 miles wide—left more than 200,000 Oklahoma Gas & Electric (OG&E) customers without electricity. These extreme weather events also caused massive disruption to the energy grid, destroying 1,347 poles, 1,452 crossarms, and 481 transformers.



Based on a safety and health management program already in place, OG&E quickly collaborated with partners, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and OSHA, to establish an Incident Command System. Daily safety briefings were held as all joined forces to assess the damage and to safely start the repair and restoration process. Getting reliable energy back to affected customers was paramount—and required that workers involved in the effort remain safely on the job.

As workers started the repair process, they encountered many potential hazards. Working at great heights increased the risk of falls.

As workers cleared debris from worksites, appropriate protective gear was required, including gloves, eye masks, and hearing protection. And, as workers labored for long hours outdoors, the risk of heat stress and sunburn increased. Despite hundreds of potential hazards, only four safety incidents were recorded during the storm-recovery period thanks to the commitment to safety, effective mutual assistance response, and heightened employee awareness.



OG&E employees and mutual assistance crews work to repair damage from the May 2013 storms.

The event gave OG&E an opportunity to use its safety and health management program and to review and enhance its safety protocols. In the future, the safety and response plan will include an enhanced coordination process among agency partners, the use of real-time information sharing via conference calls, and the development of enhanced response tools for events in more difficult-to-access areas.

Speaking Up: Portland General Electric

Each of the 2,900 employees of Portland General Electric (PGE) is encouraged to follow the same maxim: safety is everyone's responsibility. PGE, a 129-year-old electric company with more than 877,000 customers in Oregon, has embarked on a safety journey whose goal is zero employee injuries.



PGE is working toward this goal in three ways.

First, PGE is creating a work environment where employees feel free to speak up about safety. A safety observation program implemented in the company's generation division trains employees to spot unsafe behaviors and discuss ways to make work safer. A safety observation may take less than 10 minutes to complete, but this simple practice can have a huge effect on safety. Employees completed 5,298 safety observations last year.

"A safety observation is about having a conversation," says one technician. "It's a snapshot. A moment in time. Without the personal interaction, it wouldn't be effective. It's not about being confrontational."

The company welcomes any feedback intended to prevent injuries or improve its safety practices, and moved away from taking disciplinary action for near misses in 2014. Employees have responded positively, and are now reporting more near misses than ever (219 last year and more than 562 during the past three years) because reporting may prevent an injury or even save a life.

Second, PGE realized that focusing only on top-down safety won't result in zero injuries: everyone needs to be focused on safety. Therefore, the company encourages safety leadership at all levels:





- An Executive Safety Council with representation from management across the company and IBEW Local 125 leads safety culture changes, policies, and procedures.
- PGE enrolls managers, supervisors, and general forepersons in multi-day safety leadership training that gives them more tools to help create an injury-free workplace for their teams.
- The company initiated more crew visits by supervisors and holds a weekly safety call for field management in transmission and distribution. It also holds a monthly call for generating facilities to review and act on incidents and near misses.
- Grassroots teams of employees are implementing safety projects and making real change across the company. One such team tackled hearing protection. They created a program that provides new custom earplugs to affected employees—then covers them in future years within their personal protective equipment allotments. Adoption of fitted hearing protection was nominal at best before this program; now, with the program adopted company-wide, more than 79.2 percent of enrolled employees have received custom-fitted earplugs.

Because these programs are led by employees, they are gaining traction and building a positive cycle of trust. They and the top-down safety management efforts, together, have engaged employee-run safety committees more deeply than ever in keeping their assigned work areas safe. This is evidenced by a recent employee engagement survey that showed employees responded positively (five points higher than the year before) to a question about reporting unsafe conditions without fear of consequences.

Finally, employees are taking care of each other and building trust. Because of the concentrated effort of all employees to make safety part of PGE, employees and management are talking about the safety

culture more than ever. IBEW Local 125 and PGE jointly hosted a meeting of more than 600 transmission and distribution bargaining employees and their management for a first-of-its-kind Safety Stand-Down event to reflect on recent serious incidents.

PGE also has seen employees taking safety home with them. For example, a PGE manager and long-time bike commuter noticed another employee's bike helmet was loose and did not fit low enough on her brow. The manager took a few minutes to adjust it and explain how it should fit. A week later, the same employee, equipped with a properly fitted helmet, crashed and hit her head. "I fractured my arm and got a minor bruise," she said, "but I feel so fortunate—I didn't even get a headache. It could have been much worse."

PGE still has work to do in its journey to zero employee injuries, but the bottom line—that safety is everyone's responsibility—is integrated into everything employees do.



PGE's Safety Stand-Down brought all transmission and distribution field employees together to talk about safety in response to serious incidents.

Conclusion

Safety is the electric power industry's number-one priority. By focusing on prevention, education, and development of best practices, the electric power industry, its labor partners, and other stakeholders have successfully reduced incidents and continue to work together to advance the linked goals of zero injuries and workplace success.

THE ELECTRICAL TRANSMISSION & DISTRIBUTION PARTNERSHIP

