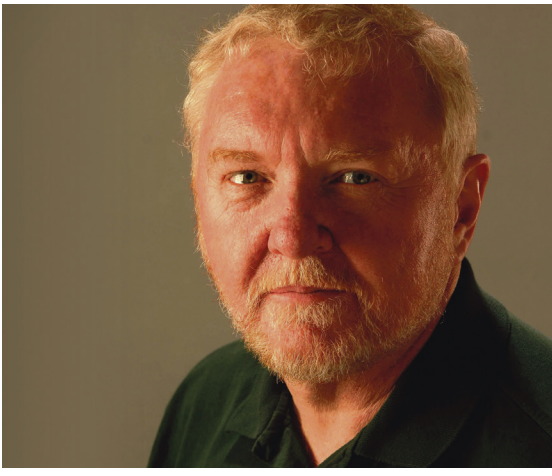


Constant Vigilance — A Prerequisite For An Accident Free Workplace



By **DON MACKINNON**
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The December 2013 ice storm that impacted 600,000 electrical utility customers in Ontario reinforced two key axioms about our electricity supply. First, we were all reminded of the indispensable role that electricity plays in everyday life. Second, we can rely on the skills and commitment of the men and women who worked tirelessly to restore power to our homes and businesses.

Some three thousand highly skilled people from Hydro One, Toronto Hydro, PowerStream and a host of other affected local distribution companies worked 16-hour shifts in difficult conditions for nine days straight (some more) to get the lights and heat back on. These workers, many who gave up their family holiday time, faced bitter cold, icy roads, downed trees and poles, snapped power lines, electrical hazards and falling branches and ice. Crews from across the province tackled the multitude of power disruptions caused by the most devastating ice storm since 1998.

That power was restored without a major accident highlights the importance of having a highly skilled and experienced workforce, comprehensive workplace safety rules, codes and standards, safe work practices and specialized training. Unions, like the Power Workers' Union, have worked diligently with the employers in our industry over the last seven decades to ensure that a province-wide safety framework is in place to protect both the general public and responding workers.

Today, new technologies are dramatically changing the way Ontario's electricity system operates. These changes require an unwavering commitment to the development of new safe work methods, procedures and training in order to achieve accident-free workplaces in the future.

Traditionally, electricity flowed from large hydroelectric, nuclear and coal generating stations along a network of transmission and distribution wires to our homes, businesses and factories.

Now, reliability must be maintained while managing a two-way flow of power that can change rapidly. Large numbers of small-scale consumer-owned wind turbines, solar panels and biogas generators produce intermittent power to sell to the grid at one price while buying the electricity they use from the grid at another. A customer can become a generator at any given time and many can be both customer and generator simultaneously. It is a constant challenge to ensure that safe work methods keep up with rapidly changing technologies.

Regardless of the industry, there are hazards present in all workplaces. Work needs to be carefully planned with a focus on safety and workers must be well-trained to implement

the plan. All the hazards must be identified, eliminated or controlled. Anything less will result in accidents, injuries and fatalities.

In Ontario, our workplace health and safety system encourages the co-operation of employers and worker representatives through the appointment of Health and Safety Representatives and the establishment of Joint Health and Safety Committees that are required to inspect the workplace and address health and safety issues in the workplace. It should be no surprise that the safest workplaces are those where employer and worker representatives genuinely work together to create an accident-free workplace.

When the parties can't agree, the Ministry of Labour can be called in to assist or intervene.

The single most important legal right that a worker has to protect himself or herself in Ontario workplaces is the right to refuse to work in situations where the worker has reason to believe that equipment, the physical condition of the workplace or the threat of workplace violence is likely to endanger him or her. In the event of a health and safety related work refusal, the Ministry of Labour is called in to investigate and prescribe remedies to ensure that workers are safe.

This year, in Ontario, tens of thousands of workers will be injured and hundreds will die from workplace accidents and industrial illnesses. Ensuring workplace safety requires constant vigilance and we still have a long way to go.

A Changing Electricity System Raises New Workplace Safety Challenges

Electricity underpins our economy and standard of living.

It keeps our businesses and factories humming, charges our cell phones and lights our homes and businesses.

Every day, the dedicated men and women who help generate and deliver electricity face high-risk, hazardous conditions in their workplaces that must be managed.

New technologies—like wind farms and solar panels, smart meters and controls, microgrids and energy storage—are changing the way Ontario's electricity system operates.

This raises new workplace safety challenges that require changing workplace safety rules, codes and standards, work practices and skills training.

The Power Workers' Union is committed to being part of this process to ensure public safety and an accident free-workplace today and tomorrow.

For more information please go to: www.pwu.ca

FROM THE PEOPLE WHO HELP KEEP THE LIGHTS ON.

