

## OSHA Issues New Arc-Flash Hazard Guidance



First guidance update in almost twenty years tells workers: “Don’t wear fuel”

OSHA released updated PPE guidance on November 25, 2024, to provide Americans working on energized electrical equipment proper protection from electrical arc hazards.

The OSHA announcement provides appropriate guidance for employers and employees to ensure that arc-flash protective clothing and equipment is provided for and worn by anyone working on or near energized equipment. Until this updated OSHA guidance action, over 600,000 workers did not have proper PPE or equipment to prevent injury from deadly arc-flash hazards, despite industry standards such as National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 70E: Standard for Electrical Safety in the Workplace.

In a statement, The Partnership for Electrical Safety (PES) said the organization strongly supports this guidance improvement and commends OSHA leadership for addressing this critical industrial safety concern.

Formed in 2020 to advocate for proper PPE and arc-rated and flame resistant (AR/FR) clothing for all Americans conducting work on or near energized electrical equipment, PES represents the leading companies in the PPE and AR/FR clothing industries. PES member companies provide life-saving AR/FR gear for American workers that insulate and protect wearers from the electrical hazards they face.

This action is OSHA’s first arc-flash guidance update in almost 20 years. It consists of four parts, including a detailed document for employers and three one-page documents for workers. The new guidance was primarily issued to address the two leading causes of arc flash injuries and fatalities in the U.S.: claiming work is deenergized which does not qualify (most work fails the standard) and thus having no AR clothing or other PPE; and choosing to work energized when voltage is low (120/208, 277) despite the lack of justification and lack of PPE because of the common and dangerous myth that low voltage isn’t hazardous.

The guidance makes it clear that low voltage, including 120/208, can sustain arc flash, produce molten metal, ignite flammable clothing, and cause severe or fatal injury. All energized work over 50V requires an energized work permit and almost all work requires PPE including arc rated clothing. OSHA also notes the significant majority of tasks which claim to be deenergized do not qualify as such. They do not meet either LOTO (OSHA) or ESWC (NFPA 70E), and thus require PPE, including arc rated clothing: “It is crucial to understand that deenergizing without locking/tagging out **does not** eliminate the electrical shock and arc flash hazards.” They further note that the steps to deenergize are energized work, as are all the steps to reenergize, and as such require PPE including arc rated clothing.

As the U.S. continues to invest in large-scale electrification projects such as electric vehicle and direct current (DC) chargers, employers will continue to hire workers with limited training and experience against arc flash hazards. The timing of OSHA's important action better prepares these employers and their new employees to improve workplace safety and prevent avoidable injuries.

PES Chairman Scott Margolin said, "This new guidance is a game-changer and could not have come at more appropriate time. In addition to the hundreds of thousands of electricians currently being asked to work without life-saving PPE, we're at an inflection point. Our country is investing in renewing the grid, EVs and DC chargers as the electrification of American continues. OSHA recently made NFPA 70B - maintenance of electrical gear - a standard as well. This is fantastic progress, but will expose far more American workers - many of whom will have less training, experience, and PPE - to potential arc hazards, injuries, and fatalities. OSHA's guidance update was imperative to clarify requirements and improve safety now. PES applauds OSHA's urgent commitment to take action."

PES has worked closely with OSHA leadership and engaged a bi-partisan coalition of Members of Congress and U.S. Senators with industry backgrounds and key roles on committees of jurisdiction with oversight of worker safety. PES commends Rep. Donald Norcross (NJ-1<sup>st</sup> District), Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (PA-1<sup>st</sup> District), Senator John Hickenlooper (CO), and Senator Mike Braun (IN) for their leadership in encouraging OSHA to act. PES is working with OSHA, Congressional leaders, and industrial partners to share this important information and provide education opportunities for workers.

U.S. Representative Donald Norcross said, "Electrical workers are essential to infrastructure improvements and maintenance across our nation. As an electrician, I know the very real dangers these men and women face every day, and I'm glad OSHA is taking steps to ensure anyone working on or near energized equipment is protected from life-threatening arc-hazard events. Our workers deserve the best, and I will always fight to make that happen."

"Our nation's dedicated electrical workers brave dangerous conditions every day to fortify our power grid and secure a sustainable future that keeps our homes and communities running," said U.S. Representative Brian Fitzpatrick. "I commend OSHA for taking decisive action to protect these indispensable workers by implementing critical safety guidelines that prioritize their well-being and ensure their protection."

"We're already in the process of electrifying America. But we shouldn't sacrifice our workers' safety as we do it," said U.S. Senator John Hickenlooper. "Electric arc hazards are dangerous. Workers need proper training and protective equipment to stay safe. These new guidelines will save lives and prevent unnecessary injuries as we unlock our clean energy future!"