

Labor Management Viewpoints: Training and safety from an electrical perspective

October 13, 2004

The Electrical Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee offers programs for qualified candidates to learn the sources and applications of electrical power and gain mastery of the craft.

Our apprenticeship and continuing education training offers a multitude of classes and seminars for our members, including national and state code, new materials, tools, methods, computers and computerized controls and our first priority, safety.

As an industry, both the National Electrical Contractors Association and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers have determined that safety training certification is a priority. This industry, by its nature, mandates an increased awareness of safety issues as our product can be deadly if not installed properly. As a result, we stress this issue as well as overall construction safety issues for the job site.

We have developed a curriculum specific to these needs in a classroom format as well as hands-on training. Toolbox talks, payroll stuffers and newsletters are also used to keep safety at the forefront of the work process. All of these items are part of the education process to make working safely a first priority on all jobs.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration certifications must meet a basic standard. The idea of our entire work force being trained in meeting a nationally recognized safety standard caused our industry to take a hard look at itself. The overall benefit to the worker, the employer and the customer was very evident. With this in mind, it was just a matter of taking action.

Mandatory training

In our present labor agreement, an OSHA 10 certification class is mandatory for all of our members. This mandate means anyone failing to complete this course is not eligible to work. This is a very strong statement and commitment by our industry.

This class mandates 10 hours of classroom instruction by a certified trainer; 29 CFR 1926 – OSHA Construction Industry Regulations is the reference text used for the class.

Participants cover the general standard, environmental controls, hand and power tools, ladders, scaffolds, fall protection, electrical safety, excavations and toxic and hazardous substances. This is all very important knowledge and will equip all of our workers with an understanding of the federal regulations for various job situations.

It creates a safer working environment for all trades on the job site.

A recent major electrical specific area of safety training in our industry involves working with live electrical circuits or equipment. During the 1990s, OSHA requested the National Fire Protection Association to formulate rules governing this type of work.

The rule, NFPA 70-E, has been formulated and was formally adopted by OSHA on July 1, 2003.

With this rule, our local joint committee took the initiative to develop a curriculum to teach the electrical industry how to work with it. The rule governs the methods used when working on live equipment and calculations for shock hazard, flash hazard, arc blast hazard and personal protective equipment that are to be used. The instruction is in the whys, whens and how to in compliance with the standard. In layman's terms, do it safely and with the latest equipment.

Mike Chetney is the training director of the Milwaukee and Kettle Moraine Area Electrical Joint Apprenticeship and Training committees.