Sign Company Fined $448,000 for ‘Willful’ Violations



OSHA is proposing nearly $450,000 in penalties against a Minneapolis branch of a sign company after a worker suffered a fatal shock while installing signs and guardrails on Interstate 94 near Menomonie, WI.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is proposing $448,000 in fines against a Minneapolis, MN, branch of a sign company regarding the September 2012 electrocution death of a Wisconsin highway worker.

Joseph Janisch, a 34-year-old married father of four children, had been using equipment to install signs and guardrails on Interstate 94 near Menomonie, WI, when it contacted overhead power lines.

OSHA cited 10 violations, including six willful violations, claiming that Highway Technologies, Inc. failed to ensure that equipment wasn’t operated within 10 feet of a power line, failed to protect workers from electrocution hazards and failed to ensure that equipment being moved remained at least six feet below overhead power lines.

Four serious citations allege failure to identify electrical work zones, determine if any part of the equipment being operated would be closer than 20 feet from a power line, train each worker on safe clearance distances from power lines and ensure that each employee understood the training and risks of working near overhead power lines.

“Highway Technologies failed to protect its workers from serious electrocution hazards,” says OSHA Administrator Dr. David Michaels. “Multiple instances of the same violation over a period of time clearly demonstrate a willful failure to comply with basic safety and health standards.”

Headquartered in Houston, TX, Highway Technologies Inc. employs about 1,500 workers in 13 states who install highway guardrails, crash attenuators, barrier walls and signage. Between 2007 and OSHA’s investigation into Janisch’s death, the company has been inspected 10 times by OSHA and cited for nine violations. One of those inspections was initiated based on employee injuries sustained from contacting an overhead power line while installing a power line.

Highway Technologies Inc. has been placed on OSHA’s Severe Violator Enforcement

Program