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Farmers urged to avoid further tragedy

The tragic deaths of five farm workers in the past six months have prompted a warning from ETSA Utilities and the South Australian Farmers Federation (SAFF) to Look Up & Live as farmers sow their winter crops following recent rains.

"These deaths have been a dreadful reminder of the dangers posed by powerlines on rural properties," said ETSA Utilities' General Manager Services, Sue Filby.

"As well as the death of a South Australian farmer at Nangwarry in the South East last year, four farmers have died in Victoria recently. At least three other people on the West Coast were injured in 2009 due to contact with powerlines.

"We want to avoid a repeat of such tragedies. Everyone needs to be aware at all times of overhead powerlines – there's simply no room for error or complacency. The danger is real and extreme."

ETSA Utilities has launched a fresh wave of 'Look Up and Live' advertising, which aims to raise awareness of the danger and highlight the potential consequence of contacting or coming close to powerlines.

"We want the message to be more hard hitting with a stronger emotional content, due to the recent events and their serious outcomes. We've also been trying to reach farmers in different ways over time," Ms Filby said.

"We are working with the SA Farmers Federation to spread the 'Look Up and Live' message. It's absolutely essential that all farmers, farm contractors and pilots are vigilant at all times and remember they don't have to touch a powerline to be electrocuted or receive an electric shock."

SAFF Chief Executive Officer, Carol Vincent, said farm workers needed to maintain their vigilance as fatigue sets in at the end of long days out sowing crops.

"In their haste to sow crops farmers could become complacent about the dangers posed by overhead lines," Ms Vincent said.

"There are tens of thousands of hectares of crops being sown around the state and with hundreds of kilometres of powerlines running through rural properties, there is potential for tragedy. Farmers need to be extremely cautious at all times when working or operating equipment or machinery near powerlines, especially around sheds and workshops where machinery is stored.

"The dangers posed by electricity and powerlines are just one of the risks farmers need to consider as they prepare for what we hope will be a bumper season."

About ETSA Utilities

ETSA Utilities is South Australia's electricity distributor, delivering electricity to more than 800,000 customers. We are one of South Australia's largest organisations, employing about 1800 people throughout metropolitan and regional SA. ETSA Utilities is 51 percent owned by Cheung Kong Infrastructure Holdings Limited and Hongkong Electric Holdings, which form part of the Cheung Kong Group of companies. The remaining 49 percent is owned by ASX-listed Spark Infrastructure.

My Filby said ETSA Utilities' lines were built and maintained to exceed regulated safe ground clearances.

"How close you can safely work near powerlines depends on their voltage and the weather conditions," she said.

"Generally the higher the voltage, the greater the safe clearance distance required. Clearly, the risk is increased if you are working with tall machinery or equipment. This makes it essential that farm workers check the relative height of equipment and machinery and powerlines before they commence a task."

ETSA Utilities is committed to ongoing community education to ensure all South Australians remember to Look Up and Live. Key points to remember include:

- Always check for powerlines before starting any task;
- Ensure there is safe clearance between you, the equipment you are using, and overhead wires;
- If you don't know them, confirm the recommended clearance distances before starting work. If in any doubt, contact ETSA Utilities on 13 12 61. Information also is available at www.etsautilities.com.au

"Please heed this reminder to Look Up and Live and let's avoid a repeat of the tragedy of the past six months," Ms Filby said.

Media contact: Paul Roberts 0403 582 500