



What is *Common Ground*?

Common Ground shares practical ideas that address the top safety and health issues facing electricians.

Common Ground is based on real-world practices used by Washington electrical contractors.

Reduce on-the-job injuries: try at least one new idea from each of the 5 editions:

Worksite Hazard Analysis
Ladder Safety
Working De-Energized
Housekeeping

√ **Lockout/Tagout**

If you have a safety idea that you would like to share, or to make comments about this publication, we would like to hear from you.

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Common Ground

*electricians connect
on safety & health*



What Washington State
electrical contractors are
saying about...

Lockout/Tagout

Why Invest in Lockout/Tagout?

"Because lockout is a lifesaver"

--Manager, Electrical Contracting Firm



"You can't have a person working for you who'll eventually go against your policies on hot work or lockout/tagout. I consider any one of those violations a termination. Because they're just deadly. Anything can happen. You're exposing other people. Especially lockout/tagout. You definitely have the potential to expose other people, other trades, to death."

--Manager, Electrical Contracting Firm

The purpose of a lockout/tagout program is to protect electricians and others from an unexpected release of energy.

Electricians know to secure panels...

“One of my biggest hurdles with guys, I tell them the day they come and usually two or three times after they’ve been there – dead fronts. They just want to take that dead front off the panel, want to walk away, and they want to go down the hallway and pull the circuit, and they leave that dead front, and Mr. Taper comes along and has his taping tools. And so my rule of thumb is you can’t walk away from that panel, you can’t leave the site of that panel without the dead front on it.”

-Electrician in focus group

...Yet in this exchange between electricians, it is clear that some continue to risk their own safety:

Electrician 1: *When I’m working on a circuit I usually take some tape, red tape, ... right over the breaker.*

Electrician 2: *-Yep.*

Electrician 1: *Most people have the common sense to realize that [the red tape] means no one can touch it. But there are a few where it [unauthorized access] still happens.*

-Exchange between two electricians in focus group

If panels and breakers are not typically secured at your company, then it is time to stop and think through the risks you are accepting.

The year 2005 is the time to tighten up your lockout policies

“Yeah, the [lockout] equipment is getting more and more prevalent. It’s out there. It used to be that half the breakers you couldn’t lock out. There was no way to -- no tag on the panel to put a padlock through on the big breakers. And now all this stuff has changed.”

-Manager, Electrical Contracting Firm



√ One company’s culture

*“We have a policy to never leave an unsecured panel. In addition, electricians are authorized to **not** work on something that they are suspicious of. They are to analyze, review, question, and make judgments on the work they are about to perform. All electricians should bring their concerns to the attention of the foreman so it can be discussed. Other parties are brought in as needed.”*

-Manager, Electrical Contracting Firm

Strategies that bring life to your lockout program

√ Choose to use

Electricians at one company are allowed to choose the lockout devices that they intend to use. Following a vendor demonstration, service electricians put together lockout/tagout kits (costing about \$150 each) for their van. The locks have the company name, picture identification, and the electrician's mobile phone number on them.



√ Learn about the latest locks

A dedicated safety program was in place at a company in which an electrician was assigned light duty. The individual took on the task of compiling updated information on locks and tags. Using the Internet and local contacts, he was surprised at how much information and new technology was available. What he learned was integrated into the company's lockout/tagout program. The individual was an informal leader at his company and when he returned to the job site, his buy-in helped to foster safety behavior among the staff. While light duty assignments cannot and should not be relied upon for a company's core safety program, the time can be put to productive use when safety topics, important to the individual, are explored.

√ One company's clever cost-cutting idea

Invite a safety vendor over and ask them to bring their product along with some pizza and pop. The distributor may be willing to do this in exchange for getting their product into the hands of electricians. Because a meal is provided, attendance is good. The training is hands-on and meaningful. One company has had great success with this strategy.

√ Control the job

One company has a two-step lockout system on large jobs. In this system, the foreman puts their lock on first, followed by all other electricians. In this way, the foreman retains ultimate oversight of the job.

√ Communication



"We actually stick it on every door. It's a green sign, it's highly visible, that says, "Electrical Lockout/Tagout in progress; authorized persons only; contact (name) for admittance." We put that on every electrical room door and every panel door. Inside of every panel we put what's called a lockout log that records which breakers were locked out when, why, and then when it was released. We put the log on the exterior of the panel door. [You] can cross-reference it to see ...what's going on."

-- Manager, electrical contracting firm

Copies of all *Common Ground* editions as well as the publication, *Electrical Contractors Industry Focus Group Report* can be found on SHARP's web site:

<https://lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-research/completed-projects/healthy-workplaces-electrical-millwork-food#overview>.

All quotes, opinions and company practices were solicited through focus groups and interviews conducted by L&I's Safety & Health Assessment & Research for Prevention (SHARP) Program. This publication seeks to promote practical safety strategies; it does not attempt to interpret whether the opinions expressed meet the Washington State Administrative Code.



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