



Occupational Safety and Health Administration

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OSHA News Release – Birmingham Region

U.S. Department of Labor

December 26, 2024

US Department of Labor finds worker electrocution tied to Alabama contractor's expired tools, training failures

Dexter Fortson Associates faces 7 serious safety violations in Coaling incident

BESSEMER, AL – A U.S. Department of Labor investigation has found a local electrical contractor could have prevented a 44-year-old foreman's electrocution during storm recovery efforts in Coaling by taking critical safety measures to protect their workers.

Investigators with the department's [Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) learned the foreman was part of the three-person crew employed by Dexter Fortson Associates Inc. to restore distribution power to a series of natural gas pumps. While trying to replace a broken switch, the foreman suffered fatal electrocution from voltage in energized overhead power lines. OSHA inspectors later learned the switch was energized when the incident occurred.

"Electrical work is inherently dangerous, and industry employers must ensure basic safety standards are met to prevent a needless tragedy like this," said OSHA Area Director Joel Batiz in Birmingham, Alabama. "Now family, friends and co-workers are left to grieve this terrible loss."

OSHA investigators determined the company exposed employees to electrical hazards, when investigators found the employer:

- Permitted use of expired electrical protective equipment.
- Neglected to ensure workers' ability to recognize and address electrical hazards before work began.
- Failed to supervise workers and conduct inspections on an annual basis.
- Did not provide adequate briefings on job hazards, work procedures involved, special precautions, energy-source controls and personal protective equipment required.
- Allowed live-line tools for work on live power lines that should have been removed from service every two years.
- Let workers using tools within nine inches of an energized cutout switch and attempting to work on a broken cutout switch without ensuring that all equipment was properly de-energized as required by safety regulations.
- Failed to ensure equipment was de-energized.

In addition, OSHA found that the employer failed to inspect the worksite to identify possible hazards, before employees conducted repairs and maintenance in overhead power lines, an other than serious violation.

OSHA issued the employer seven serious violations, an other than serious violation, and [proposed \\$84,789 in penalties](#).

Founded in 1982, Dexter Fortson Associates Inc. serves utility, manufacturing and coal mining industries with power and distribution system design and installation. Today, the Bessemer company offers large motor and high-speed drive system modifications, construction and repair of electric substations and power lines, as well as research, development and manufacturing for the information services industry.

The company has 15 business days from receipt of its citations and penalties to comply, request an informal conference with OSHA's area director, or contest the findings before the independent [Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission](#).

[Learn more about OSHA.](#)

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