Case 239. 41-year-old male lineman for a telecommunications company died while he was servicing and connecting a U-Verse cable system on a 40-foot utility pole located in a residential neighborhood.

A 41-year-old male lineman for a telecommunications company died while he was servicing and connecting a U-Verse cable system on a 40-foot utility pole located in a residential neighborhood. The decedent was working from a 24-foot fiberglass extension ladder. The ladder was leaning at an approximate 75-degree angle against the midsection of the pole he was working from and the ladder's attached hooks were tied off and engaged to the strand terminal. The ladder's safety feet were deployed into the ground surface. The ladder was in god condition. The decedent was wearing all of the required safety equipment and had secured his fall protection appropriately. The firm required employees to perform a safety check of the pole prior to starting work. This safety check included: observing pole condition, checking the pole base with a long tool inserted into the ground to check for rotted wood and stability, and using a hammer to test for sound of solid or rotted wood. The workers were also required to visually check electrical equipment above them from ground level to determine if any issues are detected as well as clear foliage if necessary before working from the ladder. It is unknown if the decedent checked the incident pole, but had been observed by coworkers to have checked other poles earlier in the day as required by company protocol. Over his head was a primary electric line. Dowel pins, "threaded" on both ends were used to mount the ceramic insulator fixture to the cross arm. One end of the dowel pin was "screwed" into the cross arm. The ceramic insulator fixture was mounted (screwed on) to the other end of the dowel pin. There had been a storm in the area and a tree had fallen on the leg of cable and electrical lines involved in the incident. This force sustained on the leg caused by the falling tree may have jarred loose the insulator fixture from the dowel pin or broken the dowel pin resulting in the insulator resting on the cross arm. It appears that as the decedent was ascending the ladder, the live 4800 V primary wire and ceramic insulator fixture came loose and fell from the overhead cross arm, contacting the decedent and resulting in his electrocution. The primary wire was still attached from the two adjacent poles in a swaying or swinging manner approximately 8-feet below the cross member and 4-feet above the terminal the decedent would have been working on. There was no breakage of the 4800-volt line. A coworker was working on an adjacent pole approximately 75-100 feet away. The coworker indicated the residents heard three loud "bangs". He climbed down from his ladder and ran over to the decedent's location and found him hanging upside down.

The MIOSHA Safety Officer observed that the incident pole's wooden cross arms were rotted and the wooden dowel pins onto which the ceramic insulator fixtures were mounted (screwed) were defective. The top of the dowel pin was worn away (instead of a cylinder shape with spiral grooves) to mount (screw on) the insulator, the end of the pin "pointed", similar to a pencil shape). Other poles in the area were found to be in a similar condition.

The MIOSHA General Industry Safety and Health division's Inspection resulted in no citations being issued to the employer of the deceased.